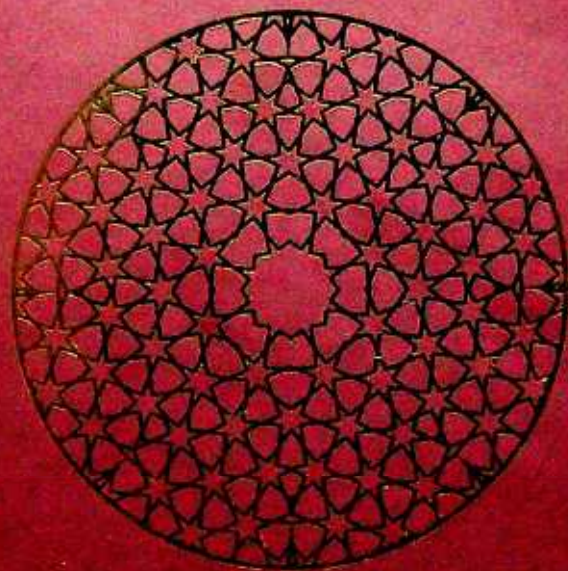


VOLUME 3

TREATISES OF
IMAM
AL-GHAZĀLĪ



IMAM AL-GHAZĀLĪ
ON COSMOLOGY

TRANSLATED BY KHALID WILLIAMS

IMAM AL-GHAZĀLĪ ON COSMOLOGY comprises texts on the wonders of creation as signs of God and a means to know Him, and eschatology. From the wider world around us, replete with signs of the divine for all to see, to the deepest recesses of the heart which only a chosen few can perceive, the entire cosmos hymns the glory of God. The four treatises included are: *al-Hikma fi makhluqāt Allāh* ("The Wisdom in God's Creations"), *Risālat al-Tayr* ("Epistle of the Birds"), *al-Ajwiba al-Ghazāliyya fi al-masā'il al-ukhrawiyya* ("Ghazalian Responses on Cosmological Questions"), and *al-Durra al-Fākhirā* ("The Sumptuous Pearl").

Imam Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī (1058-1111 CE) is unquestionably among the foremost figures in the spiritual literature of Islam—and indeed of the entire world. Until now, however, many of his writings have only been accessible to those able to read Arabic. With the appearance in fluent English translations of this collection of Imam al-Ghazālī's shorter treatises, Ihya Publishing has taken an important step to fill the gap.



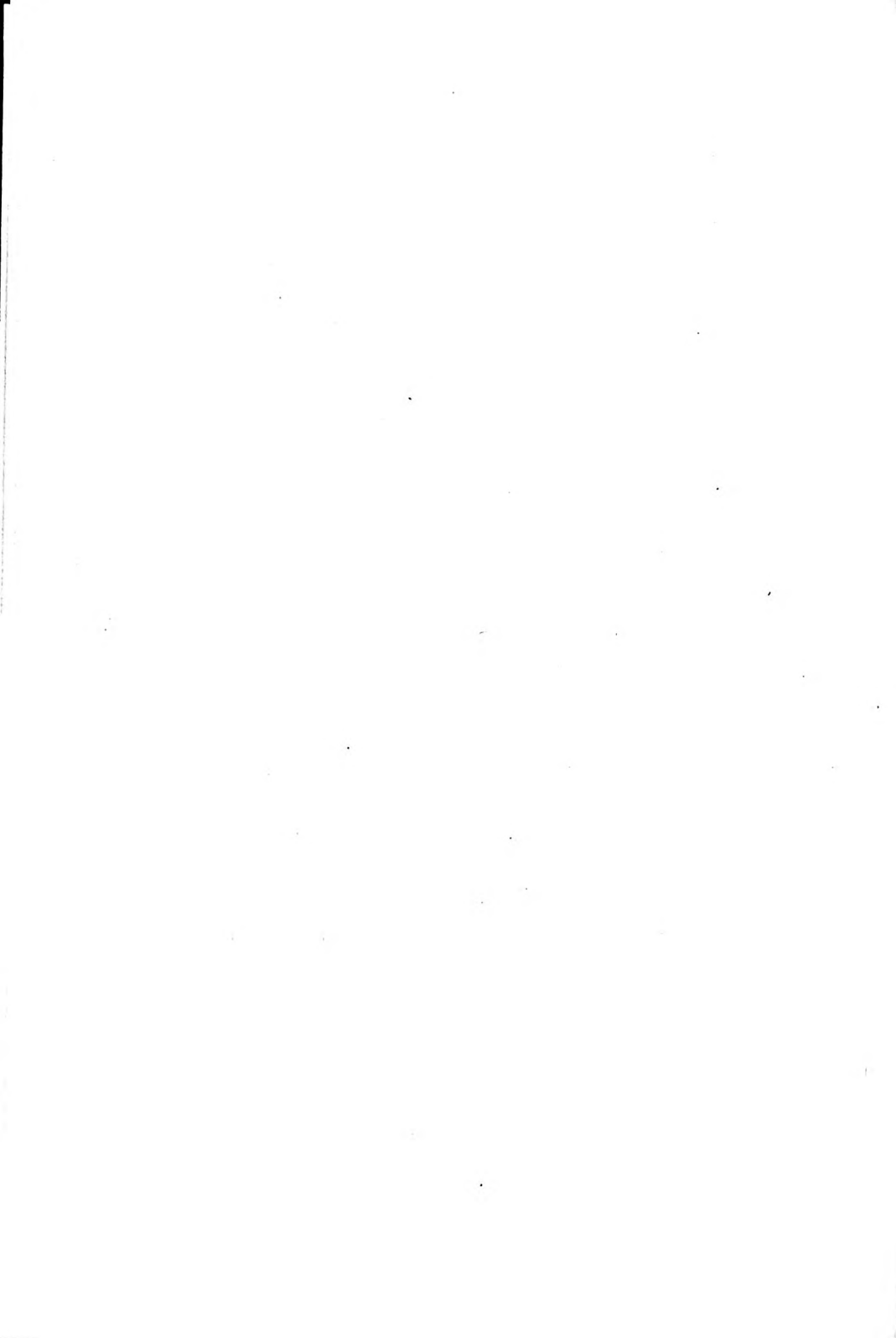
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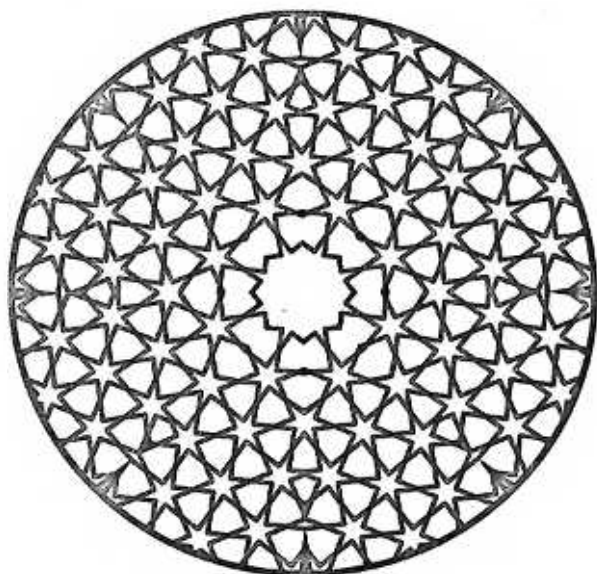
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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



VOLUME 3

TREATISES OF
IMAM
AL-GHAZĀLĪ



IMAM AL-GHAZĀLĪ
ON COSMOLOGY

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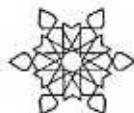
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*Have they not looked at the sky above them, how We have
built it and adorned it, and how it has no rifts?*

QUR'ĀN 50:6

TRANSLITERATION KEY

• (h)	' (A slight catch in the breath. It is also used to indicate where the <i>hamza</i> has been dropped from the beginning of a word.)	ق	q (A guttural <i>q</i> sound with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)
ا	a, ā	ك	k
ب	b	ل	l
ت	t	م	m
ث	th (Should be pronounced as the <i>th</i> in <i>thin</i> or <i>thirst</i> .)	ن	n
ج	j	و	w, ū, u.
ح	h (Tensely breathed <i>h</i> sound.)	ه	h
خ	kh (Pronounced like the <i>ch</i> in Scottish <i>loch</i> with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)	ي	y, ī, i
د	d	سَلَامُ	Ṣalla 'Llāhu 'alayhi wa sallam—used following the mention of the Messenger Muḥammad, translated as, "May Allāh bless him and give him peace."
ذ	dh (Should be pronounced as the <i>th</i> in <i>this</i> or <i>that</i> .)	اَلَايْهِ	'Alayhi 'l-salām—used following the mention of a prophet or messenger of Allāh, translated as, "May the peace of Allāh be upon him."
ر	r	رَضِيَ	Raḍiya 'Llāhu 'anhū—used following the mention of a Companion of the Messenger, translated as, "May Allāh be pleased with him."
ز	z	رَضِيَ	Raḍiya 'Llāhu 'anhā—used following the mention of a female Companion of the Messenger, translated as, "May Allāh be pleased with her."
س	s	رَحِمَهُ	Raḥimahu 'Llāh—used following the mention of a scholar or pious individual, translated as, "May Allāh have mercy on him."
ش	sh	رَحِمَهُمُو	Raḥimahumu 'Llāh—used following the mention of more than one scholar or pious individual, translated as, "May Allāh have mercy on them."
ص	s (A heavy <i>s</i> pronounced far back in the mouth with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)		
ض	ḍ (A heavy <i>d/dh</i> pronounced far back in the mouth with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)		
ط	ṭ (A heavy <i>t</i> pronounced far back in the mouth with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)		
ظ	ẓ (A heavy <i>dh</i> pronounced far back in the mouth with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)		
ع	'a, 'i, 'u (Pronounced from the throat.)		
غ	gh (Pronounced like a throaty French <i>r</i> with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)		
ف	f		

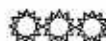


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*In the Name of God,
the All-Merciful, the Most Merciful*

IMAM AL-GHAZĀLĪ ON COSMOLOGY

In Imam al-Ghazālī on Cosmology, we have selected the texts from the collected treatises of al-Ghazālī whose main themes are cosmology, the wonders of creation as spiritual allegory and a means for knowing God, and eschatology. From the wider world around us, replete with signs of the divine for all to see, to the deepest recesses of the heart which only a chosen few are able to perceive, the entire cosmos hymns the glory of God. The waking world is rich with symbolic links to the spiritual realm that exists parallel to it, providing opportunities for lifting the veil and peering behind it; and when death comes, that veil will be pulled away in earnest and each person will be faced with the truth of what lies beyond.

The Wisdom in God's Creations
(*al-Hikma fī makblūqāt Allāh*)

The author's expressed aim in this treatise is twofold: to highlight certain verses of the Qur'ān which enjoin contemplation, and to guide the reader to contemplate specific wonders of God's creation—here described in detail—in order to understand their

wisdom and better know their Creator. Each chapter of the treatise is concerned with a particular phenomenon or class of creation and begins with a Qur'ānic verse referring directly to it. Al-Ghazālī inspires the reader to contemplate the particular features and qualities of each phenomenon, the exactitude of their functions and placement, and the manifold ways in which they serve to benefit mankind. It will be seen that the fruits of the author's pursuit of knowledge included an awareness of the ways and nature of living creatures that is impressively broad and detailed for anyone of his time—particularly someone whose specialist scholarship involved entirely different fields of knowledge.

When describing how human beings differ from animals in that they need to manufacture their clothing and utensils rather than being physically endowed with their equivalent as other creatures are, the author notes that man's intelligence and capacity for good and evil necessitate that he be kept busy with such tasks. In a passage that for the author was merely hypothetical but which in our times seems ominously prescient, he notes that if this balance were to be upset, mankind "would be destroyed by ingratitude and pride, and would despoil the earth to a more terrible extent than any other living creature could."

As al-Ghazālī proceeds through this catalog of cosmic wonders great and small, his goal is always to bring the reader back to God, to an awareness of creation as the page upon which the divine Attributes are written for all to see. After listing several aspects of the external world of nature, he ends by looking inward to the human heart, which "exults in the glory of God." The wider universe may be vast, but "if you look to the nearest thing to you, your own self, you will see wonders and signs therein that are every bit as marvelous, and greater still."

Epistle of the Birds (*Risālat al-Ṭayr*)

Little is known about the *Epistle of the Birds*. It is a small treatise that makes no reference to any other works of al-Ghazālī, making it difficult to date; nor do the author's other works contain any references to it. Further uncertainty is raised by the existence of a Persian treatise with the same title attributed to the author's younger brother Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, who was himself a celebrated Sufi master and author. The Persian text has some overlap with the Arabic, but the texts are too different for either to be a translation of the other. In any case, it was likely the Persian treatise that went on to influence Farid al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār's famous *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* (The Conference of the Birds), which is a far more elaborate and poetic version of the little parable told in this treatise. The *Epistle of the Birds* was also possibly influenced by a treatise of the same name by Ibn Sīnā, although the story told in it is different and it is probably also based on an earlier fable. Ibn Sīnā's work describes crossing eight mountains, which may have influenced 'Aṭṭār, who depicts the birds traversing seven valleys symbolizing stages of the spiritual journey.

Al-Ghazālī's *Epistle of the Birds* tells of a group of birds who decide that they must have a king, and journey to a remote island to invite the legendary '*Anqā*'—a mythical bird without any equivalent in English, but translated here as "phoenix" for literary effect—to be their king. They endure a long journey of great hardship (which few of them survive) to reach the island, where the Phoenix-King first rebuffs them for their presumptuousness, but then welcomes them and tells them in fact it was he who chose them and carried them to him, just as God welcomes the seekers into His Presence despite His transcendence and ineffability. The author explains that spiritual novices imagine that they are journeying to God as though to some foreign land, but in reality they are heading homeward.

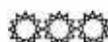
Imam Ghazālī on Cosmological Questions
(al-Ajwiba al-Ghazālīyya fi al-masā'il al-ukhrawiyya)

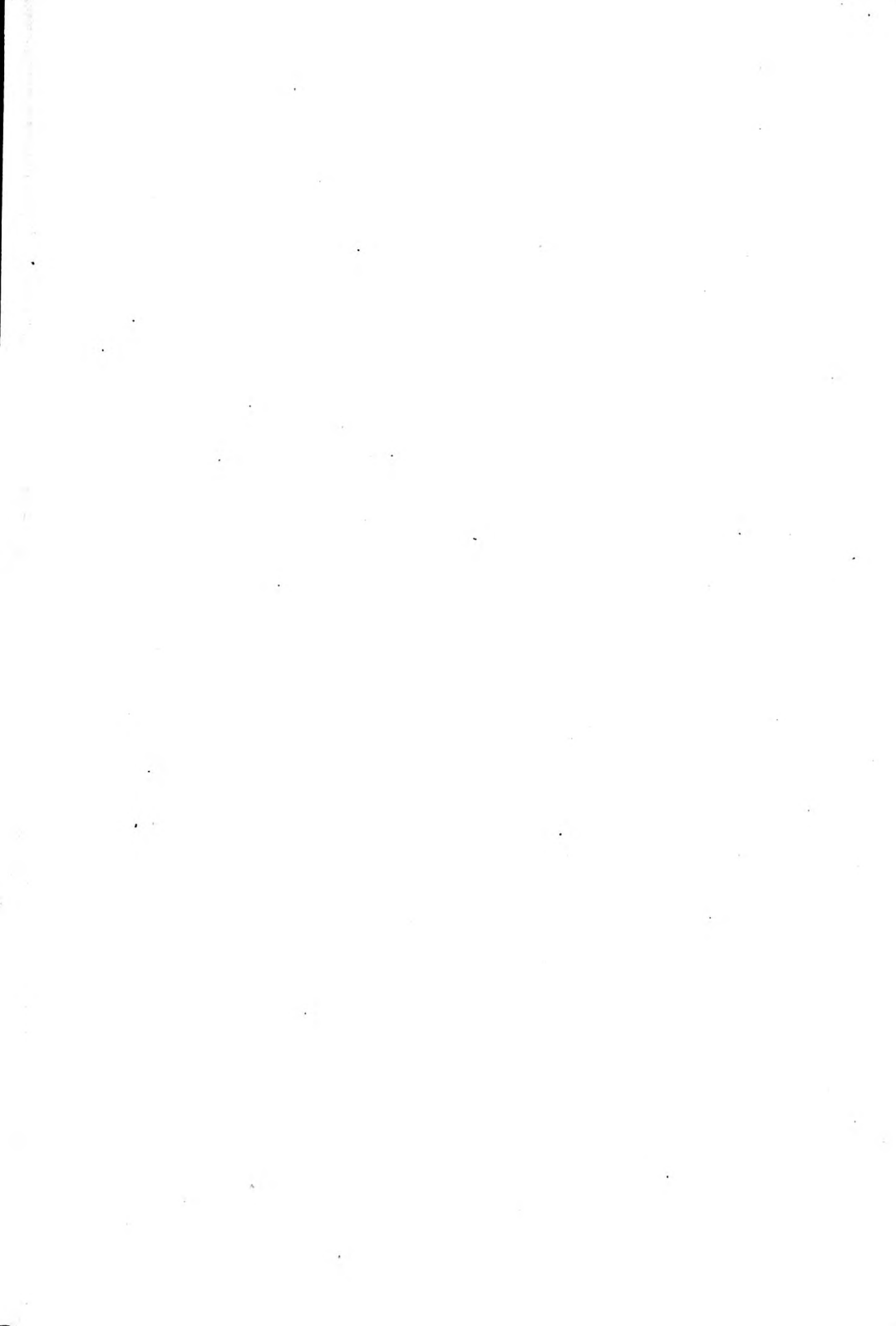
This treatise is also known as the "lesser *Maḍnūn*" on the assumption that it is the companion text the author describes at the end of *al-Maḍnūn bih 'alā ghayr ablih* (*Knowledge to be Withheld from the Unqualified*). The attribution of this work to al-Ghazālī is uncertain; Muḥyi al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī stated outright that it is not by al-Ghazālī but rather by Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī al-Musaffir, a Sufi master whom he met in Ceuta (Sibta), on the North African coast. In any case the treatise is not actually presented as a work of al-Ghazālī, but rather as "Ghazalian answers" (*Ajwiba Ghazālīyya*), a dialogue between a questioner and the Imam. This suggests that it is meant to be taken as an overview of al-Ghazālī's thinking on certain subjects, presented as though in conversation. These questions include the nature of the divine "breathing" and "shaping" of man (hence another title by which the treatise is known, *The Book of Breathing and Shaping*), the nature of the spirit, and the Image of God.

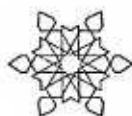
The Sumptuous Pearl (*Al-Durra al-Fākhira*)

In *The Sumptuous Pearl*, al-Ghazālī presents an account of the soul's journey from bodily life into death and the Afterlife. Much of the content is a rephrasing of material found in the *Revival*, to which the author refers throughout the text. The calamity of the Judgement is described especially vividly, and this constitutes the larger part of the treatise. Little is said here about the final abodes of Paradise and Hell, the primary concern being with the transition between this world and those destinations. Throughout the text the reader is confronted with examples of the enormous effect one's actions in this world may have on the Hereafter, how

dreadful the experience of the Reckoning will be, and how the only recourse is to throw oneself before the mercy of God and hope for the intercession of His Messenger ﷺ.

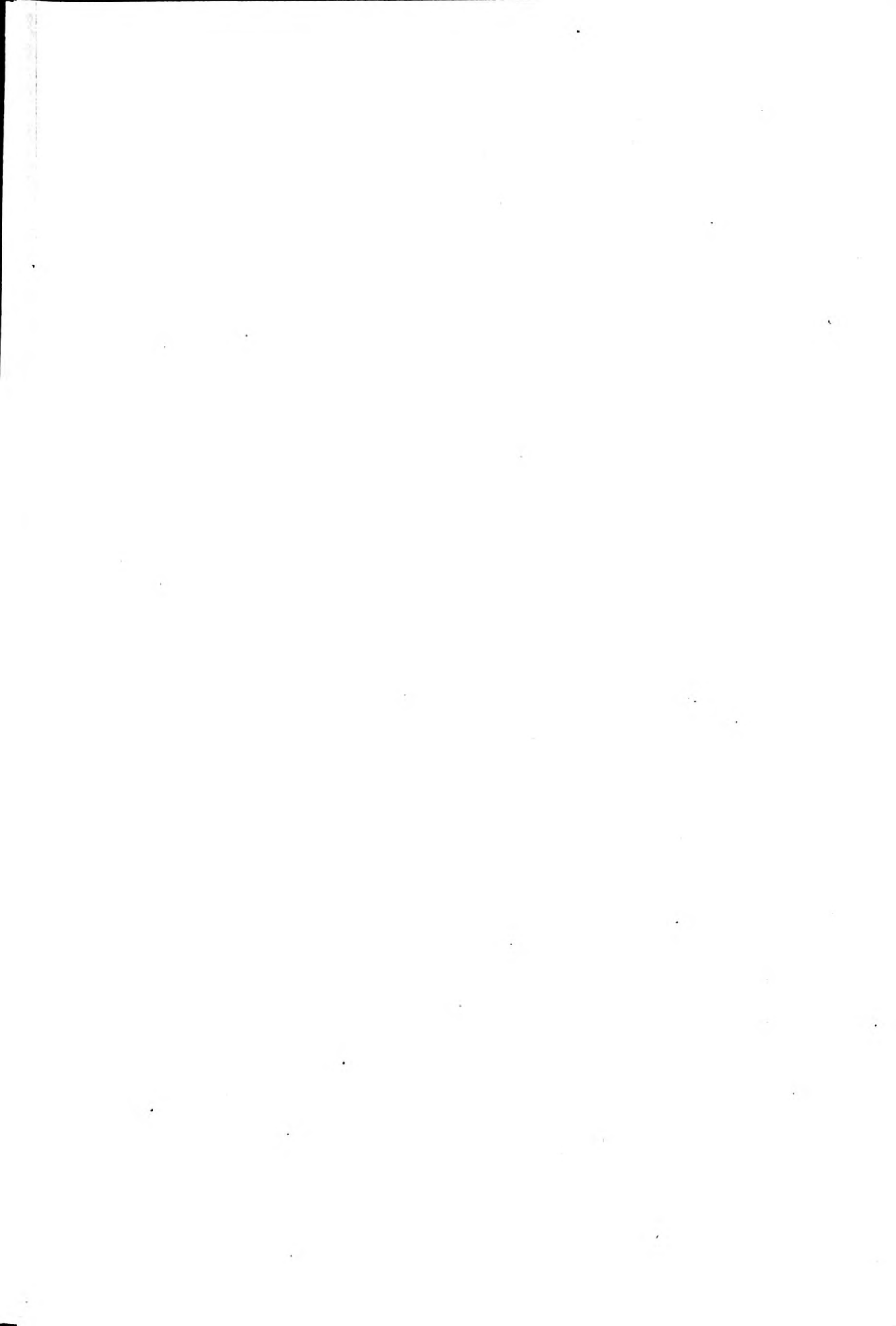






THE WISDOM IN GOD'S CREATION

Al-Hikma fi makhlūqāt Allāh





*In the Name of God,
the All-Merciful, the Most Merciful*

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

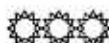
Praise be to God, whose blessings await the righteous in the meadows of Paradise, and whose special merit is reserved for the contemplatives. He has made meditation upon His handiwork a means for His insightful servants to attain firm certitude in their hearts, that they may see proof of Him in His works, and thereby come to know Him, and realize in truth that there is no god but Him alone, and bear witness to His glory, majesty, and transcendence. He is the Upholder of Justice in all affairs, and they attest to this with contemplation and reflection, knowing that He is the Forbearing, the All-Powerful, the All-Knowing. As He says in His Holy Book: *God bears witness that there is no god but He, as do the angels and the people of knowledge, upholding justice. There is no god but He, the Almighty, the All-Wise* (Qur'ān 3:18). May blessings, peace, honor, and grace be upon the Master of Messengers, the Leader of the God-conscious, the Intercessor for the Sinful, Muḥammad the Seal of Prophets, and upon all his Family and Companions until the Day of Judgment.

To proceed:

Dear brother—may God grant you the grace He grants to

the gnostics, and combine for you the good of this life and the Next—the path to knowing and glorifying Almighty God lies in contemplating the wonders of His creation, and understanding the wisdom in all His manifold handiworks. This is the way to make certitude firm and rise to the ranks of the God-conscious. For this reason, I decided to write this book to alert all intelligent people to the many aspects of wisdom and blessing to which so many of the verses in the Holy Qur'ān refer. God created the intellect and perfected its guidance with Revelation, and has commanded all who possess it to contemplate His creations and reflect upon the wonders he placed within them, saying, *Say, 'Behold what is in the heavens and the earth!'* (Qur'ān 10:101); *and from water We made every living thing* (Qur'ān 21:30); and many other verses and clear indications that are understood by those who reflect upon them. One who ascends through their diverse meanings will attain knowledge of God Almighty, which is the means of eternal happiness and the winning of immense goodness and increase that He has promised His servants.

I have arranged the book in chapters, each describing the aspects of wisdom in a particular category of creation. I have done so as thoroughly as I was able to, although even if all of creation were to work together to list all of the things that God Almighty has created, and the wisdoms that He has instilled into even a single one of them, they would not be able to manage it. Each of us can know only as much as God allows us to, in accordance with what He has destined for us. I ask God to benefit us with it, by His mercy and favor.





CHAPTER I

THE WISDOM IN THE CREATION OF THE HEAVENS

*Have they not looked at the sky above them,
how We have built it and adorned it,
and how it has no rifts?*

(QUR'ĀN 50:6)

God it is Who created seven heavens.

(QUR'ĀN 65:12)

Know, may God have mercy on you, that if you meditate upon this world you will find that it is like a constructed house containing everything it needs. The sky is raised up like a roof, the earth is laid out like a floor, the stars are placed like lamps, and minerals are buried like treasures, each prepared to fulfill its function. Man is like the owner of the house and the steward of all its contents. The plants fulfill his desires, the animals are directed towards his welfare. The Almighty created the sky and made its color especially agreeable and helpful to the eyes. If it were nothing but flashes

and rays of light, it would be harmful to look at. But blue and green are soothing colors to behold, and the soul experiences bliss and comfort when it looks at the sky in all its vastness, especially when the stars are out and the moon is shining. Kings decorate the ceilings of their palaces with designs and ornamentation that are pleasing to behold, but if one looks at them for long enough they become tiresome and lose their luster. To gaze at the heavens, however, is another matter; and all people, kings and commoners alike, look to the sky for comfort when the pressures of life are too much to bear, finding solace in its vast expanses. The wise say that a major determiner of contentment and happiness in your home is the amount of sky you are able to see.

The stars and the moon follow their courses through the sky as it moves, and people all over the world are guided by them. The sky also contains tracks that can be seen all across it, like pathways of light; it is said that they are aggregates of tiny stars, which people may follow when they are lost and use to determine which direction to go. Some say that this is what is meant by God's Words, *And by the heaven full of paths* (Qur'ān 51:7); some say *hubuk* means "paths," others that it means "beauty". Either way, it is clear proof of its Maker, Whose wise, eternal, and orderly handiwork speak to His vast knowledge and will. Glory be to the All-Powerful, the All-Knowing, the Willing!

It is said that there are ten benefits in gazing at the heavens: it reduces anxiety, decreases temptation, abates irrational fear, reminds one of God, inspires reverence for God in the heart, dismisses base thoughts, helps those with the disease of melancholia, consoles the yearning, comforts the lover, and is the *Qibla* for supplication.





CHAPTER 2

THE WISDOM IN THE CREATION OF THE SUNⁱ

He made the sun a lamp.

(QUR'ĀN 71:16)

God Almighty created the sun for reasons that He alone knows in full; but one of the aspects of wisdom behind it which we can apprehend is that He caused its motion to determine the cycle of day and night all across the world, without which religion would not be able to function. How could people pursue their livelihoods and see to their affairs if the world were always dark; and how could they enjoy life if they were deprived of the bliss and benefit of light? Without the light of the sun, eyesight would be redundant and colors would not show.

Consider also how the sun sets and disappears from the view of those upon whom it has risen the previous morning, and the

i The printed text has "The Wisdom in the Sun," which is both inappropriate and inconsistent with the titles of the other chapters.

wisdom inherent in this. If not for that, mankind would have no peace and repose, which they sorely need in order to let their bodies rest and their senses dull, and to digest their food and obtain nourishment from it. They would feel compelled to work continuously until their bodies were worn out, since most living beings, in their eagerness to acquire what benefits them, would never calm down and rest were it not for the coming of nightfall. Furthermore, the earth would get hotter and hotter as the sun kept on shining down upon it, until all the plants and animals on its surface burned up. But thanks to the way it sets in one place just as it rises in another, the sun acts like a lamp in a house which is sometimes turned on for light and other times extinguished for rest. And with its heat, it acts like a fire which one household utilizes for cooking until they have no further need for it, whereupon they make way for their neighbors, who use it the same way and then pass it on to others. It is always benefiting people on earth with a cycle of light and darkness, which thanks to their opposition provide the world with what it needs to be kept stable and sustained. God alludes to this when He says, Say, *'Consider: if God made night everlasting over you until the Day of Resurrection [what god other than God could bring you light? Will you not then hear?]*' (Qur'ān 28:71).

Furthermore, the lengthening and shortening of the sun's cycle causes the seasons, so that plants and animals follow their proper course of development. Consider how it follows its course over a certain duration so that every day it rises and sets at slightly different times, according to the path assigned to it by its Creator. But for its rising and setting there would be no night and day, and the passage of time would not be measurable. Perpetual darkness would spell destruction for most living creatures. Reflect on how God has made night a time of repose and covering, and day a

time of liveliness.¹ Consider how He makes night intrude into day and day into night, so that their lengths differ over time in a specific order. Contemplate how the sun's course lengthens so that summer is distinct from winter, and how when it sits lower in the sky the weather becomes colder and winter arrives, while when it sits higher in the sky the weather becomes hotter, and when it is midway between them the weather becomes temperate. These four seasons of the year govern the affairs of plants and animals and set them in order.

The benefits of these alternating seasons are patent. In the winter, the heat withdraws into trees and plants so that the constituents of fruit are engendered within them, and the air becomes dense so that clouds form and rain falls. The bodies of animals become hardy, and the processes of nature strengthen. In the spring, the constituents of nature that were engendered in the winter come into activity, and plants grow by God's leave, and trees come into bloom. Most animals give birth to their young in this season. In summer the weather becomes hot and fruits ripen. Manure decomposes, and the earth becomes dry and ready for whatever work is to be done upon it. In the autumn the weather becomes fresh and illnesses clear up. The nights lengthen, allowing certain activities to be done, and harvest time comes. All of this occurs gradually so that the change does not come all at once. There are other benefits besides, which it would take too long to mention here. This should suffice to show you the design of the All-Wise and All-Knowing, and the vastness of His knowledge.

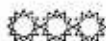
Reflect also on how the sun moves through these stages to govern the annual cycle, which contains the four seasons of spring, summer, autumn, and winter, and how its passage through this complete cycle determines the full development of crops and fruits,

i Or, "of [gaining] livelihood." See Qur'an 78: 11.

and then begins again anew, each year marking the passage of time according to the plan of the All-Wise, the All-Knowing.

Consider how the sun shines upon the whole world in the manner that [God] directs it, Hallowed and Exalted is He. If it always shone in the same place and never moved, its rays would only reach certain spots and never others, because mountains and walls would block it from us. But instead, the Almighty makes it rise in the east so that it shines towards the west; it then follows its path across the sky, shining upon one spot after another, until it reaches the west, which was blocked from it at the start of the day. In this way each place takes its share of light from it.

Consider also the durations of night and day, and how the Almighty fixed them in a manner that benefits the world, such that if they deviated from them it would cause harm to all the animals and plants on earth. Animals would be harmed because they would not be able to rest as long as it was daytime, and herbivores would go on grazing until they had nothing left to eat. Plants would be harmed because the constant sunlight would dry them and burn them up. Constant night would prevent most animals from moving and seeking their sustenance; and plants would be denied the natural heat they require, and would rot away as a plant does when it has no access to sunlight.





CHAPTER 3

THE WISDOM IN THE CREATION OF THE MOON AND STARS

*Blessed is He Who has placed in the heaven constellations,
and placed therein a lamp and a shining moon.*

(QUR'ÂN 25:61)

Know, may God grant you success, that when God, Infinitely Perfect and Exalted is He, made night to cool the air and grant repose to living beings, He did not make it completely dark and bereft of any light at all, such that it would have been impossible to do anything at all during it. For people still need to do things at night, whether because it is essential to do so or because they do not have enough time during the day, or because it is too hot, or for many other reasons. Hence the light of the moon at night is one of the things whose help we need for this purpose. He therefore made it shine on some nights, but not with the brightness and heat of the sun, so that people would not be as active as they are during the day and so harm themselves by upsetting the calm and repose that they enjoy during the night. He also gave the stars enough light to

be a help when there is no moonlight, and made these stars adorn the sky with beauty to provide comfort and joy to the people of the earth. The subtle beauty of this design lies in how He assigned a suitable duration to darkness because of the need for it, yet also placed a little light within it in order to meet other needs.

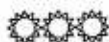
The moon is also a means of telling the passage of months and years, which is a further blessing and benefit from God to man. The stars too provide other advantages, for they act as guides and markers for many other points in time with practical significance such as sowing and reaping, as well as providing guidance for travelers on land and at sea and in forecasting rain, heat, and cold. Those who travel through the dark of night in wildernesses and rolling seas are guided by them; as the Almighty says, *He it is Who made for you the stars that you may be guided by them amid the darkness of land and sea* (Qur'ān 6:97). Their movements across the heavens to and fro from east to west also provide splendor and beauty, especially the moon as it waxes and wanes, shines bright and is eclipsed. All these are signs of the omnipotent power of their Creator, Who directs them in this manner for the good of the world.

Consider also the swift passage of the heavenly bodies across these paths each day and night, in a manner we can observe as they rise and set. If not for their swift motion, they would not cover that distance in twenty-four hours. If the Almighty Creator had not arranged that they be elevated far above us, the speed of their movements would dazzle us and fill the sky with bright flashes like lightning spreading through the atmosphere. Observe, then, the Lord's kindness in placing them so very distant from us that they never do anything unpredictable. They are always arranged in a manner that satisfies the needs for them. Think of how certain stars appear at certain times of the year and disappear at others, such as the Pleiades, Gemini, and Sirius. If they all appeared at once, none of them would have any useful significance to mankind, but

their limited appearance at different times provides certain benefits. Then there are others, such as the Plough, which are always visible and so serve as guides for travelers on land and at sea.

Consider also that if all the celestial bodies were stationary, the significance of those of them that move would be lost; and consider the benefit of the predictions that can be made by observing the movements of the sun and moon through the constellations. Likewise, if all of them moved, their motions would not have observable patterns and mansions relative to others, for the courses of those of them that move are only known by observation of their movement through the lower constellations, just as the course of a person travelling on land is only known by reference to the stations by which he passes.

This firmament, then, with its sun, moon, stars, and constellations, continues to move around this world following that consistent pattern throughout the four seasons of the year, for the benefit of the plants, animals, and other things upon it, according to the design of the Almighty, All-Knowing Lord. In His immense wisdom He created the celestial bodies, through which this world is kept stable, with the utmost precision and enduring stability and changelessness. He spared mankind from having to experience any change in this momentous business. If any change did threaten it, it would be utterly beyond their ability or ingenuity to prevent it, and that change would necessarily have an impact on the earth, since the earth's fate is linked to that of the heavens. All of this unfolds in accordance with the decree of the Almighty Creator, never changing or breaking with its pattern, as ordained for the good of the world. Glory be to the All-Knowing, All-Powerful Lord!





CHAPTER 4

THE WISDOM IN THE CREATION OF EARTH

And the earth We laid out—what excellent Outspreaders!

(QUR'ĀN 51:48)

Contemplate how God has made the earth a floor upon which living beings may reside. They must have somewhere stable to live as well as nourishment, and so the earth provides them not only with vegetation to eat, but also with shelter from the heat and cold, and somewhere to bury things with offensive odors, whether it be waste or dead bodies, human or otherwise. The Almighty says, *Have We not made the earth a lodging, for the living and the dead?* (Qur'ān 77:25–26), and this is one of the interpretations that have been suggested for those verses.

God also smoothed out pathways upon the earth so that mankind might travel through it in pursuit of their needs. He designed it to preserve the species of all manner of animals, crops, and plants, and made it a stable home to accommodate them, as He says: *And after that He spread out the earth, bringing forth its waters and pastures; and He set firm the mountains, as provision for you*

and your livestock (Qur'ān 79:30-33). By this means He allowed mankind to travel through it in search of their needs, to sit for relaxation, to sleep to gain rest, and to move about for their labors. If the earth were constantly trembling and shifting, they would not be able to get anything done with any degree of precision, whether agriculture or artisanry, nor would they be able to enjoy life with the earth trembling beneath them all the time. But in His infinite wisdom He tempered this by occasionally sending earthquakes to put fear into people, so that they might be conscious of Him and desist from injustice and sin.

Consider also the particular manner in which God decreed the natural coolness and dryness of the earth. Had He made it too dry, so that it was nothing but hard rock, the plants that afford life to all animals would not be able to grow upon it, nor would it be possible to farm it or build upon it. He therefore made it soft enough to allow for these things. He also made some lands at higher altitudes than others, so that the water would descend and irrigate the land before arriving finally in the sea, like a slanted roof on a house that allows rainwater to run off it. Otherwise, the water would spread out evenly across the earth, flooding the streets and impeding people's activities.

Consider also the minerals that God created within the earth, and the variety of precious materials that are extracted from it, with their many benefits and diverse colors such as gold, silver, ruby, emerald, amethyst, and other precious stones of all different kinds. Other materials besides these are also found within it, providing both beauty and practical benefits, such as iron, copper, tin, lead, sulfur, arsenic, zinc, marble, gypsum, naphtha, and many others that can have utility for mankind. God sent these blessings to humanity so that they might thrive upon earth.

Reflect also on how God made the earth soft and easy to work in the places where He intended mankind to thrive. Had He made

it all as firm as the mountains that would have been impossible, since agriculture requires soft earth for crops and fruits to grow. If the earth were hard the water would not reach the seed, and indeed the seed itself could not be buried if the soil were not moist, nor could a weak shoot push its way through hard rock. The plant must have soft soil so that it may grow and absorb the water that falls upon it, and so God Almighty creates roots for it beneath the ground until it stands up on its stalk, and makes it so that it has as many roots below as it has branches above. In His mercy, He also makes the earth soft enough for people to dig wells where they need them, which would be very difficult to do in the mountains. The softness of the earth also makes it easier to travel upon, since it is difficult to travel on hard rocky ground and natural pathways do not form in it. God Almighty alerts us to this when He says, *He it is Who made the earth pliant for you, so walk in its tracts* (Qur'ān 67:15); and *We set therein ravines as roads, that perhaps they may be guided* (Qur'ān 21:31). Soft earth also allows people to build and to make bricks and earthenware, among other things. The places where salt, alum, borax, and sulfur are found tend to have especially soft soil. Most kinds of plants grow only in soft soil and sand, not on dry rocky ground. God also creates many animals on such land because it is easy for them to dig burrows.

We already mentioned the wisdom in the minerals that God created in the earth. The Almighty tested Solomon ﷺ: as He says, *We made a fount of molten copper flow for him* (Qur'ān 34:12); that is, "We allowed him to benefit from copper easily, and showed him where it could be found." God also says, reminding His servants of His blessings: *We sent down iron, wherein is awesome power and many uses for mankind* (Qur'ān 57:25); "sent down" here means "created", as in His Words, *He sent down for you of livestock eight pairs* (Qur'ān 39:6). He also inspired them with the notion of extracting gold, silver, and other substances

from within the earth to utilize for their everyday needs, such as for dishes, vessels, or containers, as well as precious materials to store in them safely until they are needed. He also inspired them to extract various kinds of mineral that are beneficial, being used as kohl.ⁱ Glory be to the Generous Giver!

Another of the great aspects of wisdom in the earth is the creation of the mountains. God Almighty says, *And He set firm the mountains* (Qur'ān 79:32); *And He cast into the earth firm mountains lest it quake beneath you* (Qur'ān 16:15); *And We sent down water out of the sky in measure, and lodged it within the earth* (Qur'ān 23:18). He created mountains upon earth for many purposes, some being known only to Him. One is that He sends down water from the sky to give life to the land and its inhabitants; and if there were no mountains, the water would be at the mercy of the weather, the heat of the sun, and the softness of the soil, and people would not be able to access it without much digging and toil. So God made the mountains so that water would be stored within them and be released gradually into springs, rivers, and lakes from which people could drink on hot days until rain fell. Other mountains do not have water within them but carry snow atop them, which preserves the water on their surface until the sun melts it and it forms streams and rivers from which people may benefit in the same way. Other mountains have pools on their surface from which water may be obtained.

Another benefit of mountains is that certain kinds of trees and herbs grow upon them that cannot be found elsewhere. These include forests of huge trees that provide wood for building ships

i The author offers four examples here, but three appear to have been corrupted during transcription as no mention of them can be traced outside this text, where they are spelled in various ways in different editions. In Book 29 of the *Ihyā'*, Imam Ghazālī mentions "naphtha, sulfur, tar, and others." See *The Book of Contemplation*, tr. M.I. Waley, p. 57.

and houses, as well as rare herbs and plants. Their lowlands too provide farmland for people and dwellings for wild animals and bees.

Mountains also provide dwellings for people to protect them from the heat and the cold, as well as sites for secure burial grounds; God mentions this in saying, *They hewed out dwellings from the mountains, feeling secure* (Qur'ān 15:82).

Another benefit of mountains is that they serve as landmarks to which travelers may refer to get their bearings upon land, besides acting as beacons for seafarers indicating to them where there are harbors and shores. Mountains also provide refuges for small bands of fighters who are heavily outnumbered, giving them a place to seek safety from insurmountable odds. Consider how God created gold and silver within them and measured them out precisely, instead of scattering those precious substances all over the place in abundance, which He was well able to do, and as He did with water. He did so was purely because He knew that this was for the welfare of His creatures, as He indicates when He says, *And there is nothing but with Us are the treasures thereof, and We send it not down save in a known measure* (Qur'ān 15:21). Glory be to the All-Knowing, the All-Wise!





CHAPTER 5

THE WISDOM IN THE CREATION OF THE SEA

*He it is Who has subjected the sea, that
you may eat from it fresh meat.*

(QUR'ĀN 16:14)

Know, may God have mercy upon you, that God Almighty made the seas so vast because of the great many benefits within them. He made them surround the landmasses such that there is one giant ocean that surrounds all the land on the earth, and the total amount of land on the planet compared to the water is like a small island in a vast sea. Consider, then, that just as the sea dwarfs the lands, so too do the living creatures of the sea far outnumber those of the land. You have witnessed many wonders upon the land, so just imagine what marvels must lie in the depths of the ocean, where there are many more animals, precious materials, and riches than you can find ashore. The vast size of the ocean allows it to house enormous creatures that one might mistake for islands or mountains if they appeared above the water. Every type of living creature upon land, be it human, bird, horse, cow, or another, has

analogues in the ocean which outnumber it. The sea also contains many kinds of animals that have no counterparts on land. For each of them, the Almighty Creator has provided for its needs and welfare. Volumes could be written on any one of these.

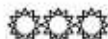
Consider also how God created pearls inside oysters under the water, and coral clinging to rocks down there. He says of this bounty, *From the two seas come forth pearls and coral* (Qur'ān 55:22); some say that the word *marjān* (coral) actually means "small pearl."ⁱ He follows this by saying, *Which of your Lord's boons will you two deny?* (Qur'ān 55:23); His boons are His favors and blessings. He also places ambergris and other treasures in the sea.

Consider also the marvels of ships, and how they sit upon the surface of the water carrying people in pursuit of wealth and other interests. This is another of His signs and favors: *and the ships that run in the sea with what benefits mankind* (Qur'ān 2:164). By His authority, the ships carry them and their cargos to and from places in a manner that only sea travel would allow, for otherwise the journey would be extremely difficult, and the cargo would be impossible to transport across such distances by land. Yet since God Almighty desired to be kind to His servants and lighten their burden, He created wood that is not only light enough to float on water by itself, but also to carry heavy burdens upon it; and He inspired His servants with the notion of using this wood to build ships. He then sent winds to blow at certain times to propel those ships from one place to another, and inspired their users with knowledge of when they blow and when they abate, so that they could use this knowledge to aid them in their voyaging.

Consider also how the Almighty assisted them in this regard by the manner in which He created water; for it is a subtle fluid

i In which case the verse would be translated *From the two seas come forth pearls great and small*.

substance that adheres together like one mass yet can easily be parted, allowing ships to sit upon it but cut through it. It is curious that anyone could be unaware of God's favor in all of this, though any part of it ought to inspire much contemplation. All this provides patent proofs and obvious signs that eloquently attest to the majesty, omnipotence, and marvelous wisdom of their Maker. Each one seems to say, "Can you not see my shape, my form, my qualities, my uniqueness, my abundant benefits? Could anyone of sound mind imagine that I made myself, or that something else of my kind made me? No, this is the handiwork of the All-Powerful, All-Subjugating, Almighty, Compelling Lord!"





CHAPTER 6

THE WISDOM IN THE CREATION OF WATER

From water We made every living thing.

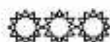
(QUR'AN 21:30)

*With it We grow splendid gardens whose trees you could
never make grow. Is there a god beside God? No,
but they are folk who ascribe equals.*

(QUR'AN 27:60)

Consider, may God grace you with success, how He, Infinitely Perfect and Exalted is He, has blessed His servants with fresh water, by which the life of every animal and plant upon earth is sustained. If a man were in need of a drink of water and it were withheld from him, he would readily trade any of the riches of the earth he could find for it. It is strange how people overlook this tremendous blessing, for in view of their intense need for it God has made it readily available to them. If He had restricted it, all who dwell on earth would find themselves in dire straits.

Consider also the delicacy and subtlety of water, so that when it falls upon the ground it seeps into it and nourishes the roots of plants; and it is so light that the heat of the sun is enough to raise it to the tops of the highest trees, even though it is its nature to fall downwards. And since every living thing must drink it in order to receive its nourishment, He made it pleasant and agreeable to drink at times of need, so that the drinker feels delight and comfort. He also made it a means of removing dirt and impurities from the body and from clothing. When earth is wetted it becomes suitable for building and other work, and the same applies to every dry thing that can only be utilized when it is moistened. Water also forms the basis for other beverages and makes them drinkable. It can be used to put out fire and stop its spread. A weary man may use water to wash away his exhaustion and find new strength. Water is essential for cooking, and for all things that require moisture. The essential benefits it provides to mankind are endless. Just see how widespread these blessings are and how easy water is to obtain, and how people overlook its great value despite their need for it. If it became hard to obtain, life on earth would become unbearable. The fact that God, Hallowed and Exalted is He, has made it so abundant shows that He wanted the world to teem with animals, vegetables, minerals, and other beneficial things that are beyond counting. Glory be to the Magnificent, Grace-Bestowing Lord!





CHAPTER 7

THE WISDOM IN THE CREATION OF AIR

*And We send forth the winds to fertilize, and send down
water from the sky to provide you with drink;
and you are not its treasurers.*

(QUR'ĀN 15:22)

Know, may God have mercy upon you, that the winds blow through the sphere of air, and without air every living creature on land would perish. The heat in the bodies of all living things is regulated by breathing, and air is for them what water is for aquatic creatures. If a living creature is prevented from breathing, the heat within it will go to its heart, causing death.

Consider also the wisdom in how the wind drives clouds so that rain falls in places where it is needed for agriculture. Were it not for the Almighty's generous creation of wind, clouds would remain immobile and the land would not benefit from them. Wind also propels ships so that they may carry goods from place to place, taking the produce of one land to another where it is not found so that the people there may benefit from it. But for this wind,

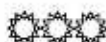
that produce would remain only where it naturally occurs, as it would be difficult to transport it elsewhere using only beasts of burden. People have needs that can only be met by transporting things to them that are not produced locally. This also provides many benefits to those who engage in this transportation and trade.

Consider also the lightness of air, and how its movement between different areas of the world keeps the land fresh. If not for this, all places would become stale and living creatures would die of plagues and sicknesses. It also carries dust and nutrients to orchards, enriching the soil and strengthening the trees that grow there. The winds carry soil which covers mountain faces, making farming possible there. Wind also stirs up waves in the sea which carry things to the shore from which people can benefit, such as ambergris.

Consider also how rain is dispersed by the motions of air so that it lands on the grounds in drops, rather than all falling in a single torrent that would destroy anything it landed upon. The drops of rain then collect together and form rivers and lakes upon the land without any resultant harm, providing for people's needs in the best way imaginable. Observe the effect of God's mercy. Glory be to Him Who is kind to His creatures and directs His kingdom! Contemplate the vastness of this mercy and how its benefit spreads far and wide. As the Almighty says: *He it is Who sends down water from the heaven, from which you drink, and from which come forth plants on which you pasture your livestock. With it He makes crops grow for you, and olives, and date palms, and grapes, and all manner of fruit. Truly in that there is a sign for people who reflect* (Qur'ān 16:10-11). Then, to complete the blessing and perfect the wisdom, He decrees that there be periods of clear skies between rainfalls, so that they follow each other for the good of the world. If either of them were constant, this balance would be destroyed. If rain were always falling, plants and vegetables would go putrid,

homes would be destroyed, roads would be flooded, and many professions and crafts would become impossible in addition to travel. And if the skies were always clear, bodies and plants would dry up, and the water in springs and rivers would go stagnant, causing great harm to people. Dryness would dominate over air, causing sickness. Food prices would go up. Grazing would be impossible, and bees would not find any moisture in flowers. But since they alternate, the atmosphere is balanced and each one of them wards off the potential harms of the other, so that things are set right. This is the norm that God wills to exist.

You might object that some of the aforementioned harms do in fact sometimes occur. Our answer is that this may be to alert mankind to the fact that in His grace and mercy, God Most High has made it the norm for these things to regulate one another by opposition, thereby warning them against injustice and wrongdoing. Are you not aware that a person suffering from a bodily sickness must take bitter and unpleasant medicine in order cure the ailment and regain his health? God says, Exalted is He, *But He sends down in measure, as He wills. Truly He is All-Aware, All-Seeing of His servants* (Qur'ān 42:27).





CHAPTER 8

THE WISDOM IN THE CREATION OF FIRE

*Have you considered the fire you kindle? Did you make its timber,
or are We the Makers? We have made it a reminder and
a comfort for travelers. So glorify the Name
of your Lord, the Tremendous.*

(QUR'ĀN 56:71-74)

Know, may God grant us all success; that the creation of fire is one of the greatest of God's favors to His servants. Yet since He knew that if it were abundantly spread throughout the world it would cause great harm, in His wisdom He restricted it so that it can be found and used when it is needed; and until then, it is stored within physical objects. Fire has countless benefits. One is its use for heating food and drink which otherwise would not be edible, digestible, or properly brewed. Contemplate the Creator's kindness in this important regard.

Consider also the needs people have for gold, silver, brass, iron, lead, tin, and other substances. Without fire, there would be no way to get use out of these things. It is used to melt brass to make vessels

and other things. God Almighty reminds us of this great blessing, which is deserving of our gratitude, by saying, *They fashioned for him whatever he wished: sanctuaries, and statues, and basins like reservoirs, and anchored cauldrons. 'Work, House of David, in thankfulness, for few of My servants are truly thankful'* (Qur'ān 34:13). It is also used to soften iron to make all kinds of useful items as well as instruments of war such as weapons, armor, and countless other things. As God says, *We sent down iron, wherein are great power and many uses for mankind* (Qur'ān 57:25); *And We taught him how to make garments for you to protect you from your own violence. Will you then give thanks?* (Qur'ān 21:80). It is also used to make implements for agriculture, smithing, masonry, carpentry, and many other crafts. If God Almighty had not blessed us by creating fire none of this would be possible, nor would we be able to use precious metals like gold and silver for coins, or for ornamental and utilitarian purposes. Without fire, these rare substances would be no more useful than dirt.

Consider also how God Most High has made fire a source of joy and comfort for people in the darkness of night, providing them light to guide them and allow them to go about their business. Thanks to its light they may dine and prepare their beds after nightfall, see anything that might harm them, and tend to their sick. They may utilize it whether on land or at sea, and take comfort from it as though the sun had not set at all. They may use it to protect themselves from the harm of snow and icy winds. It has its wartime uses too, and can be used to capture strongholds that would otherwise be impenetrable. Reflect on the immensity of this blessing that the Almighty has put under their control, so that they may kindle it or keep it in store, however they desire.





CHAPTER 9

THE WISDOM IN THE CREATION OF MAN

*We created man from an extract of clay; then We made him a drop
in a secure lodging; then We fashioned the drop into a clot, and
fashioned the clot into a lump, and fashioned the lump
of flesh into bones, and clothed the bones with
flesh; then We produced him as another
creature. So Hallowed is God,
the Best of Creators!*
(QUR'ĀN 23:12-14)

Know, may God grace you with success, that since God Most High knew in the time before time that He would create mankind and disperse them throughout this world, and would charge them with responsibilities to test them, He created them with the capacity to reproduce themselves. He therefore made them males and females and placed love and instinctual desire in their hearts so that they simply could not withstand their lust or find any way to avert it. This instinctual lust led them to come together in a physical bond that results in the reproductive fluid being issued *from between*

the loins and the breastbones (Qur'ān 86:7) and deposited in the *secure lodging* where the fetus is formed, passing from the interior of one body into the interior of the other. This allows it to remain pure as it is transferred, for it is *a base fluid* (Qur'ān 77:20) that is corrupted and imbalanced by even the slightest touch of a foreign object, but is perfectly balanced in its constituents and free of fissures. From it God creates both male and female after its transmutation from fluid drop to clot, then to lump, then to bones which are then clothed with flesh, secured with sinews, and woven with veins. He then creates the limbs and sets them in place, and makes the head round and pierces it with the ears, eyes, nose, mouth, and all other apertures.

God endows the eye with sight, the secret of which is a marvel that defies explanation, placing therein seven layers each with its own specific form and nature, such that if any of these seven are missing or lost there is no sight. Consider the lids that enclose it, and how swiftly they are able to move to protect the eye from anything that may harm it, whether dust or anything else. The lids are like doors that open when they are needed and close at other times. And since their function is also to make the eye and the face beautiful, He made their lashes just the right length, neither so long nor so short as to damage the eye. He made the fluid in the eye saline so that it breaks down anything that gets stuck in it, and made the sides of the eye a little narrower than the middle so that anything caught in them is directed to the corners. He made the eyebrows to beautify the face and cover the eyes, and made their hairs, like the eyelashes, neither too long nor too short.

God made the hair of the head and beard able to grow long or short, such that one may choose a pleasing length for them without risking disfigurement.

Consider also the mouth and tongue, and the aspects of wisdom they contain. God made the lips cover the mouth like a door that

closes when it does not need to open, thereby protecting the teeth and gums as well as lending beauty to the mouth, which would look unseemly without them. They also aid in speech, as does the tongue, so that the thoughts that lie in a person's consciousness may be expressed. They also receive food and pass it on to the molars for chewing and easier swallowing.

He then made the teeth into separate units rather than making them one single large bone, so that if one of them becomes dull the others can still be used, and He combined in them beauty and utility. He made those that are inverted have extended tips so that they match the row beneath them in length. He made them hard in a different way to bone because they are constantly in use. He made the molars larger and more powerful because of the importance of chewing, which is the first stage of digestion, and the incisors and canines for cutting up food. In addition to their practical uses, He also made them add to the beauty of the mouth, in which they stand strong and firm in rows of white surrounded by red, like strings of pearls.

Contemplate also how He created moisture in the mouth that is held back until needed; for if it were always flowing, it would mar the human being's appearance. This moisture softens the food that the mouth chews so that it can be swallowed without effort or discomfort. And between eating, this extra liquid ceases to be produced, and only a little is retained to keep the throat moist to facilitate speech and so that it does not dry up, which would be disastrous.

Consider also the mercy and kindness of God in how He made food enjoyable to eat, and made taste one of the functions of the tongue and mouth. This allows one to identify the tastes that one finds pleasant and avoid the disagreeable ones, so that one may derive enjoyment from food and drink as well as satisfying the

need for them. It also allows one to test the temperature of food and drink before consuming them.

God Almighty also provided us with ears, and placed moisture in them to protect our hearing from any creatures that might try to enter the ear canal and harm it or block it. He also created the outer ear to protect the ear canal as well as to collect sound in it so that it reverberates inside, and made it sensitive to anything that might harm it, whether an insect or something else. He placed bends in the ear which echo sound and draw attention to anything that enters it, as well as providing obstacles to their entry, so that one is roused if he is asleep.

Consider also how scents are apprehended through the air in a manner whose true nature is known only to the Creator, among other things. Contemplate how He raised the nose, shaped it beautifully, and opened its nostrils, and endowed it with the sense of smell so that it might identify the aromas of food and drink, enjoy the fragrance of perfume, and avoid foul things, as well as breathing in the spirit of life to nourish the heart and relieve the inner heat of the body.

He also created the throat and endowed it with the ability to produce sounds, which the tongue then directs with varying motions so that the voice passes along differing channels, resulting in a wide variety of phonemes. He made throats differ from one another in shape, breadth, softness, hardness, and length so that people have unique voices and no two are quite the same, just as He did for faces. Because of this, it is possible to tell people apart based just on their voices as well as their faces. This is the secret of identification; for when God Almighty created Adam and Eve, He gave them distinct appearances, and then from them He created others who were distinct from their parents and from each other—and mankind proceeded in this fashion, all for the purpose of identification.

Consider also the creation of the hands and how they are guided towards their purpose of seeking benefit and defending against harm. He spread out the palm and separated the digits and their tips, and placed the four fingers at one side and the thumb at the other so that they can make a circle and arraying the fingers in a line with differing lengths. If all the people in the world from first to last came together to devise a better way of arranging the digits, they would not be able to come up with anything superior to this. This formation is what makes it possible to grasp and to give. When spread out it forms a surface upon which anything may be placed, and when contracted it forms a tool for striking. It can also be contracted partially to form a scoop, or spread out with the fingers bent to make a trowel. He also created the fingernails to adorn the fingertips and support them from the back so that they do not weaken, and so that the hand may grasp tiny things that it otherwise would not be able to or scratch the body to relieve itching. Without the fingernails, even the tiniest itch would be enough to drive a man to distraction without the ability to deal with it, for nothing else can do the job quite like fingernails can, as it is one of the purposes of their creation. They are neither hard like bone nor soft like skin. They grow, and they can be cut to suit one's preference. You can find the itchy spot with your hand even in your sleep, and other spots nearby too if necessary. If you had to depend on someone else to find it for you, it would take much time and effort.

Consider also how He elongated the upper and lower parts of the legs and spread out the feet in order to allow walking, and gave the feet toes which lend them beauty as well as strength, and adorned the toes too with nails to support them.

Reflect upon how God created all this from a lowly drop of fluid, and created from it the bones, solid strong masses to uphold and support the body. The Almighty measured them out in different

shapes and sizes each with its own purpose; long or short, straight or curved, broad or narrow. Inside these bones He placed a fine marrow for their welfare and strength. And since the human being uses his body and limbs for many different purposes, God Almighty did not make all of his bones into one single bone, but instead gave him a great many bones with joints between them to facilitate his movement, each of them designed in a specific way to allow a given motion. He then connected them to their joints and linked them together with cords that adhere to the ends of the bones as if they were ropes. He also created indentations in the ends of some bones and corresponding nubs on the ends of others so that they slot together. So, if one wishes to move one part of his body but not another, he can easily do so. If not for the wisdom in the creation of joints, this would not be possible.

Consider also how He made the head comprise fifty-five bones of different shapes and forms, some grouped together, so that the head has the form you observe it to have. Six of these are in the cranium, twenty-four in the upper jaw, twelve in the lower jaw, and the rest form the teeth,ⁱ some of which are wide and suited to grinding, others sharp and suited to cutting.

He then made the neck the seat of the head, composed of seven hollow circular vertebrae of various sizes fitting together. One could describe the points of wisdom in their creation at great length. He then mounted the neck upon the spine, which comprises twenty-four vertebrae from the bottom of the neck to the end of the sacrum, which is composed of three more bones and connects to the coccyx, which is composed of three more. The backbone also connects to the ribs, shoulder-blades, arm bones, pelvis, leg bones, and foot bones. All in all, He made two hundred and forty-eight

i A similar passage in the *Ihyā'* has "six in the skull, fourteen in the upper jaw, two in the lower jaw, and the rest form the teeth," which corresponds to the anatomy of Galen as described by Averroes.

bones in the human body, excluding the tiny bones that bridge the gaps in the joints.

Now consider how the Maker, Infinitely Perfect and Exalted is He, created all these from a minute drop of fluid. The reason for mentioning those numbers was to exalt their Designer and Creator, Who made each of them in its own distinct shape and size, such that if a single bone were added to a man's body it would be very harmful and he would need to have it removed; and if any of his own bones were missing he would need to have it restored. God Almighty made this creation a lesson for those who possess insight; and in its design and form, He placed clear signs of His majesty and glory.

Consider also how in His Infinite Perfection He created instruments for setting the bones into motion, namely the muscles, of which He made five hundred and twenty-nine in the human body. Muscles are composed of flesh, sinew, ligaments, and membranes, and have varying shapes and sizes according to their positions and functions. Twenty-four of them are used for the movement of the eye and eyelids, such that if one of them were missing the eye would lose functionality. Every other part of the body has a number of muscles that are specific to it in the same way. Then there are the nerves, veins, and arteries, which comprise a great many wonders that would be long in the telling; and the inward and symbolic marvels they contain, which cannot be apprehended by the senses, are greater still.

Consider also how the human being was singled out for the honor of being created to stand upright and sit up straight, allowing him to carry out tasks with his hands and limbs. He was not created bent over on his face like so many animals, which would not have allowed him to engage in these activities.

Reflect also upon the entire person of the human being both outwardly and inwardly, and you will find that he was designed

with such wisdom as no degree of wonderment can do justice to. The Almighty made his body grow as he takes in nourishment, but set a limit to this growth that he cannot surpass. If his body continued to grow the more nourishment he took in, human beings would grow too large to move easily and would be unable to engage in subtle crafts, nor would they be able to find enough food, shelter, and clothing to meet their increased needs. In His infinite wisdom He set this limit on human growth, out of mercy and kindness to His creatures.

When you realize that God created all this from a single drop of fluid, what can you say of His handiwork throughout the dominions of heaven and earth, such as the sun, the moon, and the stars, and His wisdom in decreeing their sizes, shapes, numbers, and positions, and how some are joined while others are separate, and the diversity of their forms and rising and setting-places? Do not suppose that there is a single particle of matter in heaven, earth, or the rest of God's world to which no wisdom attaches. Each one comprises marvels and wisdom that no one but God, Infinitely Perfect and Exalted is He, could ever wholly apprehend. Consider the words of the Almighty: *Are you a mightier creation, or the sky that He built? He raised it high and shaped it, darkened its night, and brought forth its morning brightness. And after that He spread out the earth, bringing forth its waters and pastures, and He set firm the mountains, as provision for you and your livestock* (Qur'ān 79:27-33).

Consider that if all of human- and jinn-kind were to cooperate in an attempt to take a drop of fluid and endow it with hearing, sight, and life, they would be unable to accomplish this feat. Reflect on how the Almighty created it in the womb, shaped and apportioned it beautifully, and divided its similar parts into distinct ones, setting the bones in their places, shaping the limbs, arranging the veins and nerves, assembling the body both outwardly and inwardly,

and placing therein channels for its nourishment so that it would be sustained throughout its life. Consider how He arranged the inner organs of the body—the heart, liver, stomach, spleen, lungs, womb, bladder, intestines—each organ having its own distinct shape, size, and function. He made the stomach strong and firm enough to digest food and break it down, and aided it with the teeth, which begin this process of cutting and grinding. He made the liver to convey the nourishment of food into the blood, so that the proper nutrients are carried to each part of the body in accordance with its needs; for bones, flesh, veins, nerves, and hair each have different needs. He made the spleen, gallbladder, and kidneys to serve the liver; the spleen for absorbing black bile, the gallbladder for yellow bile, and the kidneys for water. The bladder then receives this water from the kidneys and excretes it through the urethra. The veins convey the blood to the rest of the body, and so He made their substance hardier than that of flesh in order to protect the blood and keep it contained, making the veins like vessels or containers.

Consider also how He takes care of everything for the fetus in the womb and nurtures it in a manner that it would be too lengthy to explain, though in fact no one but its Creator knows the whole truth of it, and no one is capable of properly describing even their limited knowledge of it. One aspect of this is that the child is born without needing to be summoned, or to be shown the way to do it; for the process unfolds naturally until the child reaches the stage where it needs to cry out to be fed. If it did not cry out the mother would neglect it, because of the great hardship that tending to it demands. Then when the child's body is strong enough both inwardly and outwardly for it to eat and digest its own food, it grows teeth just when they are needed, neither sooner nor later.

Consider also how God creates discernment and intelligence in the child gradually, until it finally becomes full-grown and matures.

Think of the secret of why the child is born ignorant and lacking intelligence and understanding. If it were born with a fully mature intellect, on emerging into existence it would be unable to make any sense of it; it would be totally bewildered upon seeing so many unfamiliar things that lay entirely outside its frame of reference and experience. It would also feel indignation at being swaddled, carried about, and laid down in the crib, though its body would be too feeble to be treated any other way. Moreover, the usual compassion and love that people feel in their hearts towards babies would not exist, for they would be much given to contrariness and making their own choices. It is clear, then, that the gradual development of intelligence and reason is in the best interests of the child. Do you see how God has ordained every aspect of your creation with the utmost wisdom and judiciousness, and shown you the way to seek out errors both subtle and obvious?

Consider also how when the child grows older, God creates in him the means to procreate and puts hair on his face to distinguish him from children and women, as well as to beautify him and conceal the wrinkles on his face when he grows old. For females, the face remains hairless so that it retains its vitality and glow, which stirs up passion in men and facilitates the preservation of the species.

Now reflect on all that we have described, and how the Almighty directs it through all these diverse conditions. Do you suppose that something of this magnitude could come into existence randomly? What would happen if the blood did not supply the fetus with nourishment in the womb? Would it not shrivel and die like a plant denied water? And if the birth contractions did not rouse it when it was fully developed, would it not remain in the womb and cause death both to itself and to its mother? If it did not have milk to drink after being born, would it not die of hunger and thirst and be forced to take inferior nourishment from another source?

If teeth were not created for it at the proper time, would it not be unable to chew its food and grow, and be forced to go on suckling without growing stronger? If the hairs on its face never grew, would it not remain forever like a woman or child without ever attaining an aura of dignity and grandeur? Who could provide it with all of these functions, each at the appropriate time, except for the One Who created it out of nothing and graced it with all these favors?

Think of the sexual urge that promotes procreation, and the instruments and motions that convey the fluid drop to the womb, and contemplate the wise design inherent in this. Then think of all the parts of the body and how each of them has a form befitting its function: the eyes for guiding by vision, the hands for manipulation and defense, the feet for walking, the stomach for digestion, the liver for purification and separation, the mouth for speech and consumption, the anus and urethra for excretion of waste. If you reflect on these and all the other aspects of the human body, you will find that they have been deployed according to the utmost wisdom and suitability. Think of how food reaches the stomach where it is digested, whereupon the beneficial part is sent to the liver along slender veins which act like sieves so that nothing too large or rough reaches the liver where it might scrape it. It then transforms it, by God's leave, into blood, which is distributed around the body through channels designed for this purpose, so that each part receives what it requires. *Blessed be God, the Lord of the Worlds!* (Qur'ān 40:64). The foul and unneeded parts are then transferred to other organs whose function is to deal with them, as we noted earlier, and which serve as containers to hold these unneeded parts so that they do not get distributed through the body and destroy it.

Ask yourself if you can find anything in the creation of the body that has no significance. Sight was created for the apprehension of objects and colors; if colors existed but there was no sight to

behold them, what would be the use of them? If there were no external light for the eyes to see, what would be the use of sight? Likewise, hearing was created for the apprehension of sounds; if sounds existed but there was no hearing to apprehend them, what would be the use of sounds? The same applies to the other senses. Consider those things that link the senses to their objects, without which the senses cannot function, such as aether and air. If there were no aether in which visible things could appear, vision would not be able to perceive them. If there were no air in which sound is transmitted to the ear, hearing would not be able to apprehend sound.

Think of someone who is unable to see, and all the problems he faces. He cannot see where he puts his foot, nor does he know what is in front of him, nor can he distinguish colors. If he were under attack from an enemy or some other danger, he would not know it. He is unable to learn most crafts. Likewise, someone who cannot hear is unable to participate in the spirit of dialogue and conversation, and is denied the pleasure of beautiful sounds and pleasant melodies. Others find great difficulty in communicating with him. He cannot hear the things people say or the stories they tell, and so he is almost absent though present, almost dead though alive. Then there is one who is devoid of sound mind, whose situation is even worse than that of the animals.

Observe, then, how all these body parts and attributes constitute the wellbeing of the human being when they are fully functional, allowing him to achieve all his purposes. If any of them are impaired, his balance is lost and he suffers great misfortune. If anyone should be tested with the loss of any of these faculties, he should know that it is a lesson teaching both him and others the value of God's favors. If he bears it patiently, he will be greatly recompensed in the Hereafter. Behold the mercy of God, and how it is found both in giving and in deprivation!

Consider also the wisdom in how the body parts were created in singles and in pairs. The head was created single, for to have any more than one would be unnecessary given how many sensory faculties a single head already possesses. If these faculties were shared among two heads, that would mean that for instance one head would speak and not the other, rendering the other useless; or both heads would say the same thing together, rendering one superfluous; or both heads would say different things at the same time, which would render them both unintelligible to the listener. The hands, in contrast were created as a pair, since one hand alone would not be enough to allow a person to do the things he needs to do. You can observe this for yourself if you encounter a person with a paralyzed arm, and see how he struggles with things that a person with two functional arms can do easily. The wisdom of legs being created in pairs is obvious.

Consider also the way the vocal instruments are created. The throat is like the tube through which the voice is produced, while the tongue, lips, and teeth mold the voice into phonemes. Observe how a person missing some or all of his teeth has impaired speech. Contemplate also how the throat has the additional benefit of drawing air into the lungs to cool the heart, and how the tongue manipulates food and aids in eating and drinking. The teeth contribute to the same as well as supporting and stabilizing the lips from inside the mouth, and the lips allow drink to be sipped at whatever rate a person desires, as well as functioning like a door for the mouth. It is clear that each of these body parts has many functions and benefits that would be impaired if anything were to be added to or subtracted from them. *That is the decree of the Almighty, the All-Knowing* (Qur'ān 36:38).

Consider the brain, which upon inspection contains many folds to protect it, and is further protected by the skull and hair, which endow it with beauty as well as shielding it from heat, cold,

and other threats. The Almighty guards the brain in this manner because He knows it is important enough to merit it, for it is the font of all sensation. Consider also how the heart is hidden in the depths of the breast, surrounded by armor of bone, flesh, and sinew because of its lofty status.

Reflect also on how He made two apertures in the throat, the windpipe leading to the lungs and the gullet leading to the stomach, and placed a flap over the windpipe to prevent food from reaching it. He then made the lungs to cool the heart without cease, breathing in and out repeatedly and effortlessly so that the heart is not destroyed by overheating. He then filled the atmosphere with air for this purpose among others.

Consider also how He made the channels for the excretion of urine and stool controllable so that they are not always open, which would be ruinous for the quality of human life.

Contemplate also how He made the thighs dense and fleshy to protect human beings from pain when sitting on the ground, the way that an emaciated person does feel pain if he sits directly on the floor without anything between his body and the ground.

Consider this, too: if a man's penis were always flaccid, how would it be possible to deliver the sperm-drop to the place where [the embryo] is created; and if it were always erect, how could one deal with it at other times? Therefore He made it concealed at most times, as if the sexual urge had not been created at all. Consider also that when a house is constructed, the lavatory is usually placed in the most private part of the building. In the same way, the passage through which a man relieves himself is in the most private part of his body, hidden by his fleshy thighs, and his penis is concealed. This is a distinction of the human being, because of his noble status.

Consider also the creation of hair and nails, and how since they can grow very long and there are benefits to cutting them, they were

made to lack sensation so that this causes no pain. If not for this wisdom, there would be two options: leave them to keep growing and disfigure one's appearance, or endure the pain of removing them. Contemplate also how if hair grew from the eyes it would impair sight; if it grew in the mouth it would be difficult to eat and drink; if it grew on the palm it would block the pleasure of touch and impede certain actions; and if it grew on the genitals it would spoil the pleasure of sexual intercourse, even though all of those places could easily grow hair. Glory be to the Designer Who provides all these blessings!

Observe, then, how the creation of man follows the right path and avoids error and harm. Consider also the design and wisdom inherent in his natural requirements for food, sleep, and sex, all of which are motivated by instinctual urges. Hunger and thirst compel him to seek food and drink, wherein lie life and sustenance. Sleep provides the body with repose and reinvigorates the faculties. Sexual desire ensures the continuation of the species. If man only ate and drank because he knew that he needed to, without being compelled by instinct to do so, he would forget to do it because of his preoccupation with other needs, and he would grow feeble and perish. Consider how a man may be aware that he needs medicine, but because it tastes unpleasant and he has no instinct driving him to take it, he may refuse to do so, and sicken and die as a result. Likewise, if sleep were a purely voluntary affair, people would avoid it in order to pursue more interesting concerns until they simply died of tiredness. Just so, if sexual intercourse were solely a matter of procreation not tied to any instinctual urge, man would go extinct through distraction. Observe, then, how God created instinct in man, compelling him to pursue these interests.

Contemplate also how these faculties are arranged in a wise and wondrous hierarchy, such that the body and its contents resemble a king's palace containing a retinue and staff responsible for its

upkeep. One of them sees to the needs of the retinue and draws water for them. Another retains things in its stores until they are needed. Another inspects them and makes sure they are ready and in still better order than before. Another keeps the palace clean and removes refuse from it. The king in this parable is the All-Knowing Creator Himself, Infinitely Perfect is He; the palace is the body; the retinue are the body parts; and the staff are these four faculties, which constitute the soul and its position in man in terms of cogitation, estimation, intellection, memory, irascibility, and so on. Consider what would happen to a man if he lost only one of these; memory, for instance. He would not remember his rights and duties, nor his past deeds or experiences, nor what he has given or taken, nor what he has seen or heard, nor what he has said or been told. He would not remember who has been kind to him and who has been cruel, nor who has helped him and who has harmed him. He would not be guided as to the right path even if he were following it, or to knowledge even if he studied. Writing down [knowledge] would not benefit him, nor would he be able to learn from the examples of those who came before him. Reflect on these blessings, then, and the wonders of each one of them taken separately, let alone all of them collectively.

If memory is a marvelous blessing, then forgetting is more marvelous still; for if a man could not forget he would never get over any misfortune that befell him, for the pain and anguish would never diminish. He would not be able to let go of his resentment, nor enjoy any worldly delight, as long as the memories of all the disasters and rude awakenings he had ever experienced continued to resonate in him. Nor would he ever be able to rest easy, for those who envied him or meant him injustice or harm would never forget him either. Behold, then, how God Almighty endowed man with both memory and forgetfulness, though they are opposites, and provided him with many benefits in each of them.

Consider also how God singled out man among all the animals to have a sense of shame. Without shame, many obstacles would be unavoidable and many needs would be neglected. Guests would not be honored, good conduct would not be valued, and vile traits would not be avoided. Many obligations in society are fulfilled only because of shame. People fulfill their trusts, honor the rights of their parents and others, and abstain from indecent behavior, simply out of a sense of shame. Reflect on what a great blessing this is.

Contemplate also the tremendous favor of speech which God has granted to man, and which distinguishes him from the animal kingdom. He can express what is in his mind and make himself understood to others. This is accompanied by the blessing of literacy, which conveys information about people of the past to those of the present, and about those alive today to those to come in the future. Thanks to writing, science and literature can be immortalized in books, and people can keep records of their calculations and transactions. Without writing, the events of one era would be unknown to others, much learning and literature would be lost, and there would be many wide gaps in human knowledge.

You might object that speech and literacy are acquired by mankind rather than being natural phenomena, which is why different languages use different scripts and have different words for things. Our response to this is that writing is only possible because of the hands and fingers that perform it and the intelligence and cogitation that guide it, none of which are human accomplishments. Without them, man could never write a thing; so, glory be to the One Who blessed him with them! Likewise, without the tongue and its natural ability to speak, and the mind that forms the thoughts that it utters, man could never speak; so, glory be to the One Who blessed him with them!

Consider also the wisdom in anger, which was created in man to spur him to defend himself from harm, and jealousy, which spurs

him to pursue what is beneficial for him. Yet he is commanded to be moderate in them, for if he oversteps the bounds, he will join the ranks of the devils. When angry, he must do no more than ward off harm; when jealous, he must restrain himself to no more than the desire to benefit himself without anyone else coming to harm.

Reflect also on how man's welfare sometimes lies in what he is given, and sometimes in what is withheld from him. One example of this is hope, which is what causes man to civilize the earth and procreate, so that the weak may inherit the benefits of civilization from the strong. A human being begins life in a feeble state, and if he were not born into a thriving civilization, he would not have any safe place to go or any useful tools to use. Hope, therefore, is what causes people to work for the welfare of those who will come after them, and so on for generation after generation until the Day of Judgment. A man's ignorance of how long he has to live is for his own good. If he knew that he would have a short life, he would lose the desire to live and would have no concern for procreation or civilization; and if he knew he would have a long life, he would sink into depravity and sin, for no preacher's admonitions would have any effect on him, which would lead to his ruin. As long as he has no idea how long he has left to live, he will be fearful of the looming possibility of death and eager to do righteous deeds while he still can.

Consider also how many things provide benefit and pleasure to man: food in all its diverse flavors, fruits and their many colors and delights, riding mounts of all sorts, birds with pleasant songs, money and precious substances he may acquire and use to obtain his desires and needs, medicines to preserve his health, animals for food and other purposes such as agriculture and burden, flowers and other fragrant things that provide perfumes as well as other uses, and clothing of diverse kinds. All these are the fruits of the intelligence and understanding that have been created in him.

Behold the wonders that God has instilled within him! One aspect of His great wisdom is how the Children of Adam differ in the extent to which they own things that benefit them, such that the poor among them are distinct from the rich. This causes civilization to thrive and directs people to engage in activities that do not, in most circumstances, harm them. They are like a child who, because of his lack of intelligence, engages in something that is bad for him, but if he stopped then the consequences for him would be worse.

There are countless other aspects of wisdom and subtle graces in the Lord's design, which ensure that the world will continue to thrive for as long as it is destined to. These wisdoms are beyond all reckoning, and no one knows their extent but the All-Knowing, All-Wise Creator, Whose mercy encompasses all, and Who keeps count of all things.



To conclude this chapter, know that God Almighty has ennobled and honored the human being; as He says, *Indeed We have honored the Children of Adam, and carried them over land and sea, and provided them with good things, and favored them greatly above many of those We created* (Qur'ān 17:70). One of the greatest honors He has given him is the intellect, by means of which he may recognize His splendor, and because of which He has raised him to the realm of the angels and made him worthy of knowing his Maker and His handiwork by contemplating His creation and finding therein evidence of His Attributes, thanks to the wisdom and trust that He has placed in his soul. God Almighty says, *In the earth are signs for those who are certain, and in your souls. Can you not then see?* (Qur'ān 51:20-21). By looking within himself and beholding the intellect that the Glorious Maker instilled in him—for he is certain that this intellect exists, though he cannot

describe it—he may find the greatest evidence of the existence of his Maker, Designer, Creator, and Shaper. He may observe the intellect's power to plan, to acquire all manner of knowledge, science, and wisdom, and to discriminate between benefit and harm; and though he is certain that it exists, he does not perceive it to have its own identity, nor hear it make any sound, nor see any locus for it, nor smell any scent from it, nor observe it to have any form or flavor. Yet it commands and is obeyed, grows and aspires, contemplates and bears witness to things unseen and imagined. It can grasp things that the eye cannot see, and contain things that no physical container could hold. It believes in things that God Almighty's veils have hidden from it, whether they be above the heavens or below the earth, with a conviction that is almost clearer than the vision of the eye. It is the seat of wisdom, the treasury of knowledge. The more knowledge it acquires, the vaster it grows and the more powerful its authority over the body becomes, to the degree that the body seems to move the very instant the intellect tells it to, and one is not sure which came first, the thought or the response, although in fact it was the thought.

Yet despite the intellect's cognitive power, knowledge, and wisdom, it is unable to know itself by itself; the most it can say of itself that it does not know what it is, but must be told what it is by someone else who does know. But aside from its ignorance of itself, the intellect possesses knowledge and wisdom by which it may distinguish the subtleties of design and the intricacies of craft. Events play out in the manner it anticipates, the consequences it predicts come to pass, and it is able to make deductions based on evidence. Its ignorance of itself despite its knowledge of how to plan and discriminate mean that it must be a created being designed and shaped by an entity with total power over it; for despite its wisdom and penetration it remains a feeble and lowly thing, struggling to remember what it has forgotten or to forget

what it remembers, striving to be happy yet being sad, trying and failing to ignore some things and be heedful of others. Whatever it may know, it is ignorant of the true nature of what it knows. For all its planning, it does not know such simple things as how far its voice carries or how the words it utters are formed, nor how far it can see or how its eyes work. It does not know its own strength, nor the constituents of its will and aspiration. For it to know so much, and yet be ignorant of the true nature of what it knows, must mean that it was created with consummate expertise and wisdom, proving the existence of the All-Knowing, All-Willing, All-Powerful Creator, Glorious and Majestic is He.

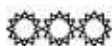
He also created in man a desire that conforms to his nature. If he utilizes the light of the intellect in all that he has been commanded to do, he will arrive at wellbeing and Tomorrow he will win the Abode of Generosity; but if he utilizes it to achieve his base desires and ambitions, he will be barred from knowledge of things that only he has the power to apprehend, as well as incurring the terrible fate of being veiled [from God] and tormented in the Hereafter.

The intellect is also man's chief instrument for engaging in the crafts, for it is the mind that formulates the plans that are then carried out by the hands. The intellect has great powers of deduction, and can identify the conduct that is deemed good and proper by any community in any era, as well as recognize what wise and virtuous people deem to be good or bad based on cultural norms.

Consider, then, how God has ennobled the human being by creating in him the power to attain all this knowledge. The honor of a container is determined by what it contains, and the honor of the human heart lies in its being the seat of knowledge of God. In His wisdom, God Most High decreed before time began that mankind would pass on to another world after this one, and He did not endow their minds with the ability to discover the nature of that world. He therefore perfected the light of the intellect with

the light of His Message to them, and sent the Prophets, upon them be blessings and peace, to convey good news to those who obeyed Him and warnings to those who did not, assisting them with Revelation and preparing them to receive and transmit it. Compared to the light of the intellect, the light of Revelation that comes from God is like the sun compared to a star. The Prophets guided mankind to their worldly welfare regarding those matters that they could not resolve by reason alone, as well as guiding them to their welfare in the Hereafter, which they could never have known without the mediation of the Prophets. He provided them with convincing evidence of the truth of what the Prophets conveyed to them, giving them no choice but to believe and yield to it. With this, God's favor to mankind was completed, His grace was made manifest, and His argument against them was made plain. Behold the nobility of this Adamic being and his progeny, from whom descended the great figures who received these blessed additional favors, so that the lights of the Laws shone forth like the sun, and the lights of the intellects like stars. Thus did God assure salvation for those for whom He willed the best, and damnation for those who denied Him and desired only the lower world.

God further blessed the human being with dreams that he may see in his sleep or even in the waking world, showing him symbols that take the form of ordinary things he recognizes but convey tidings or warnings of what might befall him. All of these are generous gifts and favors from Almighty God, who made it so that if a person is constant in obedience to Him with his heart and his limbs, these dreams will most often be true, providing him with guidance and helping him decide whether to go for things or keep clear of them. In this way, God may give His servant a glimpse of the future, which ordinarily is known to Him alone.





CHAPTER 10

THE WISDOM IN THE CREATION OF THE BIRDS

Have they not seen the birds, subservient in the open sky?

Nothing holds them up but God.

(QUR'ĀN 16:79)

Know, may God have mercy on you, that God Most High created birds and designed them to be light enough to fly, without creating in them any parts that would weigh them down, yet still giving them everything they needed to subsist and to obtain nourishment for the individual parts of their bodies, both the hard and the soft parts. He created two legs for them but not hands, since they needed legs to walk on the ground as well as to take off and fly. He made their feet wide at the bottom so they could stand stably, and made the skin on their legs thick and strong so that they could do without having feathers on them in the heat and cold. There is manifest wisdom in His creating them in this fashion, for they need to stand in water and mud to obtain their sustenance. If their legs were feathery, they would get wet and dirty, and so the Almighty

decreed that they do not have feathers in those places where they are not suitable, but only where they are needed for flight. Those birds that have long legs have also been given long necks so they can reach their food without discomfort. If they had long legs but short necks, they would not be able to feed on land or at sea without falling over onto their chests. Many of them are further assisted by long beaks to make their task even easier. Conversely, if they had long necks but short legs their necks would weigh them down, making it difficult to feed.

In addition, He created their breasts in the shape of a circle wrapped around a half-circle breastbone to facilitate their flight through the air, and also made the tips of their wings rounded for the same purpose. He provided each species of bird with a beak that suits its diet and allows it to perform actions such as cutting, grabbing, digging, and so on. Some are hooked to facilitate cutting, such as the beaks of falcons and other carnivorous birds. Some are wide and firm, allowing them to keep a good hold on what they grasp. Some are just the right size and shape for picking up seeds and other vegetation. Some are long for reaching. He made the beak hard as bone, yet also supple in a way that bone is not, to allow its frequent use. In this manner the beak is like the teeth in other creatures.

The Almighty also made the root of a feather strong and designed it like a cane planted in the strong skin of the wing, allowing frequent flight; for the rapid movement of the wings in flight requires the feathers to be very firmly rooted. The feathers also give the bird protection from heat and cold, and allow air to pass through them during flight. The wings have the strongest and most deeply rooted feathers, because that is where they are most needed. The rest of the body is covered with a different kind of feathers which are also well rooted, giving the bird protection as well as beauty. One of the aspects of wisdom with which He endowed the feathers

is that they are not ruined by getting wet, nor do they become mired in dust and dirt. Any water that reaches them is thrown off by the slightest shake, and they become light again.

He also gave birds a single orifice for egg-laying and waste excretion, in order to keep their bodies light. He created the feathers of their tails with a shape that aids their stability in flight, without which their wing would keep making them bob left and right as they flew, such that the tail acts like the rudder of a ship. He also created birds naturally cautious, to preserve their safety. And since birds swallow their food whole without chewing, He made part of their beaks hard enough to cut flesh as well as a blade. After it swallows the whole pieces, the heat in its insides breaks down the food so that it does not have to chew it and be weighed down by teeth. One can observe this with such things as grape seeds, which can be found whole in the bellies of animals but are ground up inside birds.

He also created birds to lay eggs rather than give birth to their young, as they would become too heavy to fly if the young grew inside them until they were fully created. Can you see how God designed each thing in His creation in the wise manner that best suits it? Ask yourself who inspired the bird to alight and sit on its egg to incubate it until it hatches, and who inspired it to eat seeds and let them break down in its belly and then regurgitate them to feed its young, as some birds do. Why does it bear all this hardship when it does not have the power of forward thinking, and cannot know what the consequence will be? Nor does it harbor hopes for its chicks like the hopes people cherish for their children, such as renown, support [from them], or to live on in memory. Could this be anything other than divine inspiration from Almighty God? Consider how He inspires the females with knowledge of how to tend to their eggs, and to gather grass and sticks to make a soft nest to keep the eggs safe during incubation.

Observe how the pigeon is inspired with knowledge of when the incubation is done and the chick is ready to hatch from the egg, so that helps it to hatch. And if the embryo does not develop properly in an egg, the mother knows to abandon it. Consider also how He inspires it to feed its young properly, beginning with air so that it opens its gullet to receive the food, and then carefully regurgitating partially digested food from its own gullet into the chick's, as it is too young to digest solid food itself. Observe the wise way in which birds do this. Consider, too, how when the chick emerges from the egg, it leans it on its side so that it does not lose the heat all at once and hurt itself. Some birds are created in other ways which manifest other forms of wisdoms, so that you see how God's power is not restricted to a single type and the welfare of each thing is achieved in its own way. For instance, chickens do not feed their young in the manner described above; their chicks can pick up their food for themselves as soon as they are hatched.

Consider also how male and female pigeons take turns sitting on their eggs to keep them safe, the male taking turns with the female as though he has been inspired with the knowledge that he must do so to ensure the welfare of their eggs. The creation of the egg itself is a manifestation of God's wisdom. It contains the yolk and the white—one part from the body of the chick grows and the other part from which it obtains nourishment until it is ready to hatch. Consider the marvelous, wise design inherent in this, and how it has its sustenance with it inside a closed egg until it is formed and ready to emerge.

Consider also the bird's gullet and the design of its creation. The passage through which its food reaches the gizzard is narrow, and it can only pass through it a little at a time. If the bird waited for each seed to reach the gizzard before eating the next one it would be very time-consuming, besides the extra time it would need to be on its guard from threats. The gullet therefore acts like a bag

hanging in front of it, into which the bird may quickly deposit the food it finds and then pass it slowly to the gizzard. Another wisdom in this is that the birds which feed their young can regurgitate it quickly from the gullet.

Consider also the bird's feathers and how they are woven like garments from thin fibers dry enough to adhere around it, and soft enough not to break when they are gathered up. They adhere together in the same manner as threads or hairs line up side by side. If you try to open this weave, you will observe how they separate a little but not too much, so that the wind can blow through them as the bird flies without disturbing its flight. In the center of the feather there is a solid, dry stem from which the fibers grow like hairs, so that the feather is kept in place. Without this, the wind would simply blow the feather apart. Despite its firmness, this stem is hollow so that it does not weigh the bird down in flight.

Consider also the wisdom in long-legged birds, which are generally wading birds. Their long legs allow them to keep watch for creatures to eat in the shallow water, and to dip swiftly to grab them when they see them. If their legs were short, when they dipped they would disturb the water with their bodies and scare away their quarry.

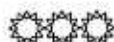
Consider birds like sparrows and how they search all day for their food, neither failing to find it nor finding it all collected up in one spot. This is the Way of God in His creation, since it is in the interest of their welfare to search for their sustenance. If a bird were to find its food in a huge pile, it would devour it all and not stop when it was full, and it would become too full to fly, while being unable to regurgitate it all from its belly as some large sea birds do when they eat too much fish. The same is true of people: if they found their provisions without any effort, they would become so indolent that it would corrupt them entirely.

Consider those kinds of winged creatures that only come out at night, such as owls and bats. Their provision is readily available in the air, such as gnats and moths, which are abundant therein and easier for them to catch than anything on the ground. Perhaps their eyes are not keen enough to catch things on the ground, since they very rarely come out in sunlight. He therefore inspired them with knowledge that their food is in the air. The bat was created without feathers, but was given something else to perform their task, and was also given teeth and other things in common with land animals such as childbirth, even though God made it able to fly. By this means He showed that the ability to fly is not confined to creatures with feathers, nor to one single type. Likewise, He created fish that are able to fly long distances above the surface of the sea and then go back under the water. Glory be to the All-Decreeing, the All-Knowing!

Consider male and female pigeons and how they take turns to incubate their eggs. When one of them needs to feed, the other takes its turn on the nest. Yet God inspires them to be eager to tend to the eggs, and neither of them is gone for too long when it is their turn to feed. They are even reluctant to leave to defecate, and they wait until they are compelled to do so, whereupon they release it all at once. Observe how when the female is almost ready to lay the eggs, the male becomes concerned with her, and pecks at her and bothers her if she goes outside the nest, fearing that she might lay her eggs anywhere but the proper place. Observe how he feeds his chicks and looks after them for as long as they require it, and then when they grow up and no longer need their parents, he refuses to feed them and shoos them away from him.

Consider also how God created birds of prey with the ability to fly especially fast so that their prey does not outrace them, and with beaks like blades and talons like butcher's hooks for carrying and cutting meat.

Consider also water birds and how they have the power to plunge into the water and grab their provision from beneath it. To every kind of bird God Most High has given the appropriate tools for gaining its sustenance.





CHAPTER II

THE WISDOM IN THE CREATION OF LIVESTOCK

*And livestock He created for you, wherein there is warmth and
benefits and whereof you eat. And in them there is beauty for
you, when you bring them home and when you take them
out to pasture. And they bear your burdens to lands
you could never reach without great hardship.*

Truly your Lord is Kind, Most Merciful.

And horses and mules and donkeys,

for you to ride and for show;

and He creates that which

you do not know.

(QUR'ÂN 16:5-8)

Know, may God grace you with success, that God created livestock for the benefit of mankind and as a blessing for them, as these verses show. He created them with flesh held sturdily upon solid bone and strong sinew and veins, all connected together. He did not make them very soft, nor hard as stone, but covered their bodies

with sturdy hides to protect them and keep them together, for He desired that they be strong enough to work and carry. He also created them with hearing and sight so that man could obtain his needs from them, for if they were deaf and blind they would be of no use to him. Yet in His wisdom, He deprived them of intelligence so that they would be subservient to man and not refuse to meet his needs, whether milling, carrying, or other.

God knew that mankind would have certain needs that they would not be able to fulfill on their own without serious difficulties, and that if they were forced to do so they would not have any time or energy left to spare for the crafts and vocations that are particular to their nature and needs, or for the pursuit of the arts and sciences. Such a situation would be sorely detrimental to their quality of life. His subdual of livestock to them, therefore, is one of the greatest blessings He has bestowed upon them.

Consider the creation of the different kinds of animals and how they are all designed in a manner that suits their welfare. Since human beings have the potential to engage in crafts and to acquire knowledge and other accomplishments, and since they cannot do without building, weaving, commerce, and other such things, they have been given intelligence, minds, and the power of thought, as well as hands with digits to allow them to grasp and manipulate things. In the same way, since carnivores live off prey and cannot do without it, they have been given claws, fangs, and the ability to pounce rapidly. And since herbivores can neither engage in crafts nor hunt prey, they have been endowed with cloven hooves to bear the harshness of the earth as they walked upon it seeking places to graze; and some have been given round hooves with hollows in the middle like the soles of feet, so that they stand sturdily enough on the ground to be ridden or carry burdens.

Reflect on the design of carnivores: how they were created with sharp powerful teeth and wide mouths, and equipped with

weapons and tools for obtaining their quarry, all of which suit them to hunting. If the herbivorous beasts of the field had been endowed with claws and fangs, they would have been given things of which they had no need, since they do not hunt or eat meat. And if carnivores had hooves they would not have the proper weapons for hunting. Look how the Almighty has given to each kind of animal what it requires for its welfare and life. Consider how infant quadrupeds are able to walk behind their mothers independently without needing to be reared and carried as humans do. Their mothers do not share the intelligence, knowledge, and grace of human mothers, who can rear their children using the strength of their minds and dexterous hands, well-equipped for this task among many others; and therefore those infant quadrupeds have been given the power to stand and walk freely on their own. Some infant birds too, such as chickens, are able to walk and eat for themselves right after hatching. Others, such as pigeons and doves, are weak and unable to stand, and so their mothers are endowed with special tenderness for them and know to partially digest food for them in their gullets and then feed them mouth-to-mouth until they are strong enough to be independent. Each creature is apportioned the tenderness and wisdom that suits it. Glory be to the All-Wise Designer!

Consider the legs of animals: how they move in pairs to allow walking, which would not be possible if they moved individually. The animal moves some of its legs [at a time], and supports itself on those which it is not moving. Bipeds move one leg and stand on the other, while quadrupeds move two and stand on the other two. They alternate between pairs on opposite sides, because if they moved both legs on one side together, they would not remain stable on the ground like a bed; and if they moved the front legs first and then the back, their gait would be inefficient. So instead they move the front right foot together with the back left one and

stand on the other two, and then the opposite, allowing them to remain firm on the ground as they alternate swiftly between the two.

Furthermore, you can see how a donkey humbly assents to carrying and milling but a horse is reluctant to do so. If a camel is recalcitrant, several grown men cannot handle it, yet it may obey a small child. A fierce bull yields to its owner and allows him to place a yoke over its neck to plough. A horse allows itself to be mounted, and it can carry swords and lances into warfare to protect its rider. A flock of sheep can be herded by a single child; if they dispersed here and there, each one going its own way, it would be very difficult or even impossible to herd them. The same is true of every animal that has been subdued to human control, for no reason other than their lack of intelligence and reason, which allowed them to be tamed. They do not rebel against their human masters no matter how hard they work them. Likewise, if predatory animals possessed intelligence and reason, they would cooperate to overwhelm mankind and strike them with an assault so fierce that it would be almost impossible to resist it, especially at times when they had dire need for food. Look at how they shrink from human contact and stay in their own habitats, fearfully avoiding human dwellings and rarely appearing in the open, usually waiting until night to go out in search of sustenance. Despite their great power and need for food, He made them so fearful of humans that they act as though they were forbidden from going near them. If not for this, they would raid their neighborhoods and pounce upon them in their houses.

Consider how the dog, though it too is a beast of prey, has been subdued to guard its master's house to the degree that it will sacrifice itself and go without sleep to ensure that no harm comes to him. It also aids its master with its loud voice so that he will wake to defend himself. It is loyal to him, and will endure hunger, thirst, humiliation, and hardship by his side. It was given this

nature for the welfare of mankind, to help them with guarding and hunting. And since the Almighty Creator made it a guard, He gave it weapons for this purpose in the form of fangs, claws, and loud barking that frightens off thieves and people up to no good, letting them know to avoid the place it is guarding.

Consider also how He gave beasts of burden flat backs borne firmly upon four legs, making them perfectly suited to riding and carrying. He also placed their reproductive organs in the proper places to allow the stallion to cover the mare, since they cannot mate face-to-face as humans do. Reflect on this wisdom and design. In elephants, the vagina is beneath the belly, but at the time of mating it rises and become more prominent to the male, allowing him to cover her. Since it was not created in the place where it is usually found in quadrupeds, this trait was created in it to facilitate reproduction. This is truly cause for reflection.

Contemplate also how the bodies of animals are covered in hair and fur, protecting them from heat, cold, and other adverse conditions; and some have hooves to protect them from going barefoot, while others have pads for the same purpose. Since they have neither rational minds nor dexterous hands with digits to engage in handicrafts, they are protected from harm by clothing that is a permanent part of their creation so that they do not need to replace it or renew it. The human being, in contrast, was created with the capacity to think and design, and given dexterous limbs to put his ideas into practice. It was for his own welfare that he was forced to engage in such things, for he was created with the ability to engage in good or evil, and his inclination towards evil is stronger. He was therefore charged with the task of pursuing his needs, in order to distract him from that which would corrupt him and ruin his religion. If he were given everything he needed at all times, he would be destroyed by ingratitude and pride, and would despoil the earth to a more terrible extent than any other

living creature could. His intelligence, which was created to bring him happiness, would lead him into damnation.

A human being is also honored with the ability to wear whatever clothing he chooses, to don it and remove it at his leisure, and to enjoy its beauty and comfort. He may select clothing and perfume to make his presence more pleasant for his companions and those he loves to have near him, which increases the quality of his life. This is a great blessing and honor for him, while the animals have no need for any of it.

Consider how God inspires tame and wild animals alike so that they cover themselves in the manner that human beings cover their dead. When one of them feels that death is near, it conceals itself in some private place and dies there. Otherwise, where are all the corpses of the beasts of prey and wild animals that die? If you look for them you will scarcely find them, and that is certainly not because they are few; indeed, if someone said that they outnumber human beings he would not be far wrong, for the open countryside is full of predators, reptiles, cattle, donkeys, goats, camels, swine, wolves, and all manner of insects and crawling beasts, as well as birds; countless life forms, of which many die and are born every day, yet their bones are not lying all over the place. God has made it in their nature that when close to death they leave their usual places and find private spots to die. Observe how all these different species are inspired instinctively to bury their own corpses, while human beings do so thanks to intelligence and thought.

Reflect on how the eyes of animals have been created to look ahead so that they can see what is in front of them and do not go careering into walls or fall into holes but keep away when they see them, though they do not know what the consequence would be if they did not. Did not the One Who made them that way do it for their welfare and safety, so that they could provide benefit?

Consider also how their mouths are positioned beneath their snouts so that they can reach their fodder and graze. If they were like human mouths, they would not be able to reach anything on the ground. They can also use their lips to draw food into the mouth from nearby, and they are inspired to select what is good and nutritious for them and leave what is not. Notice also how when they lap up water, the hairs around their mouth push away the objects on the surface of the water such as leaves and dirt, effectively filtering the water so that they drink only the pure part. These hairs act like the mouth of a human being.

Consider also the wisdom in the creation of tails on animals, and how they are like coverings with hair on the ends with various functions. One is to conceal the genitals and anus; another is that they can flick their tails to chase off the flies and gnats that buzz around that area of their bodies, as if the tail were a fan. They can shake their heads to do the same thing at the front, too. Animals are also able to perform certain special motions for the same purpose in other areas: if a fly lands on their body in a part too far away to be helped by shaking the head or flicking the tail, they can twitch the skin in that spot to disturb it. This is marvelous wisdom for creatures that do not have hands to perform such tasks. Another wisdom in the tail is that the animal may gain comfort by swinging it left and right, since it stands upon four legs and so does not have the independent use of its forelimbs, but it can move its tail for utility and comfort. It can also move it very rapidly, so that anything that disturbs it will not trouble it for long. Another use for the tail is that if the animal becomes trapped in a pool or pit, or stuck in mud, the easiest way to get it out is to pull it by the tail. Likewise, if a beast of burden is descending a steep slope and there is risk that its load will fall off its back or slip over its head causing it to fall on its face, holding it by the tail helps keep it upright

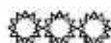
and safe from this risk. Doubtless the tail has many other benefits besides these, known only to the All-Knowing, All-Wise Creator.

Consider also the elephant's trunk and the wise design of its creation. It acts like a hand for picking up food and carrying it to the mouth, without which the elephant would not be able to reach anything on the ground, since it does not have a neck that allows it to end that low as other animals do. In the absence of such a neck, this creature was given a trunk to reach out to what it needs. Glory be to the Subtle One, the All-Aware! He also made this trunk a container for transporting water to the mouth, a nose for breathing, and an instrument for placing things upon the back or lifting a rider down from it.

Consider the creation of the giraffe, and how it was given a long neck to reach its sustenance from the tall trees among which it lives. Reflect also on the fox, which digs for itself a home in the ground with two exits, one for use at normal times and another to flee from if it is pursued. It also digs holes in other spots beneath the earth in its den, so that if it is hunted from the open tunnels it puts out its head through those holes to see which exit is the best one to escape through. Behold how God Almighty has created this instinct for self-preservation in it.

In sum, God the Exalted has created a great variety of animals with differing natures. Some provide mankind with food, and these He created subservient and tame, and He has made them subsist on plants. Others provide mankind with transportation, and these He has made naturally calm, placid, and obedient, as well as shaping them in a manner conducive to carrying. Others are fierce and aggressive, yet still tamable, for He created in them receptivity to training so that mankind could use them for hunting and guarding, as well as providing them with the necessary instruments for those tasks, as we discussed earlier. One such is the elephant, which has its own sort of understanding and is

receptive to taming and teaching and so can be used for transport and warfare. Then there are those that are fierce and aggressive, yet still seek companionship with humans for their benefit, such as cats. Some birds provide mankind with benefit because of their habits, such as pigeons which like to return to the same places and so can be used to carry messages swiftly. God Almighty also made them breed rapidly, producing much food for the benefit of man. Another example is the hawk, which is naturally averse to man but also bears within its nature the potential to be tamed, for God knew that mankind could benefit from its hunting prowess and so gave it the potential to break its usual habit and obey its master's commands when hunting. The aspects of wisdom in God's creation that are known to us are far outnumbered by those that are not.





CHAPTER 12

THE WISDOM IN THE CREATION OF INSECTS AND OTHER CREATURES

*There is no creature that crawls upon the earth, nor bird that flies
with its wings, but that they are communities like your-
selves. We have neglected nothing in the Book.
Then to their Lord they shall be gathered.*
(QUR'ĀN 6:38)

Consider ants, and how they are inspired to join together and cooperate to gather their sustenance and store it up for future need when they are prevented from going out due to heat or cold. Thanks to this inspiration, they are even more careful about this than we are, though we know the consequences of our actions and they do not. You can observe how if one of them is unable to carry its load alone, another will help it and they will carry it together like two people working together on something that cannot be done without cooperation. They are also inspired to dig their dwellings under the ground, first expelling the soil and then taking the seeds they mean to eat and breaking them up so that they do not germinate

under the earth. Who could have endowed them with this instinct but the All-Merciful? And if the seed gets wet, they take it outside and leave it to dry. They also build their dwellings in high-lying land so that they are not drowned by gathering water.

Consider the bee, and how it is inspired with many signs of wisdom and wonders. The Almighty Creator gave them a queen to follow, who guides them regarding the consumption of their provisions, and if another queen rises to challenge it, one kills the other. The benefit of this is plain: it prevents disunity, since if there were two queens each one would go its way and the bees would be split between them. They are also inspired to drink nectar from flowers, which then turns into honey in their bellies. The benefit of this for mankind is well-known: it provides them with a *drink of diverse hues, wherein there is healing for mankind* (Qur'ān 16:69), as well nutrition and pleasure. Honey has great benefits, beyond the bee's own need, which pass on to mankind, much like the milk which was created to feed the offspring of animals yet also passes much blessing and benefit to humanity. Bees also carry wax on their legs to store and preserve the honey, and you will scarcely find a better container for honey than the wax in the beehive. Consider the fly: does it have the knowledge and ability to collect wax and honey? Does it share the bee's knowledge of how to keep honey for a long time by storing it in wax, preserving it in mountains and trees where it does not spoil? Consider also how bees set out in the morning to graze and then return home in the evening carrying enough to provide for themselves and more besides, and how they arrange their dwellings wisely, constructing them soundly with room enough to store the honey as well as other spaces where they put their waste, far from where the honey is. And there is much more to them than this, as God alone knows.

Consider the spider and the wisdom in its creation. God created inside its body fluid from which it can spin webs to use both as a

dwelling and as a snare to catch its prey, created from its own body. God caused the nourishment it gets from its food to strengthen its body, allowing the creation of that fluid so that it can go on weaving those webs. It makes the web large so as to be able to lurk unseen in a corner of it, and the fine threads of the web wrap around the legs of flies, gnats, and other insects. When the spider senses this, it quickly rushes to it, wraps it up, and carries it home where it feeds on the moisture of the creature. If it does not need to feed at that time, it leaves it for later. Reflect on the means God has given it to attain its sustenance, so that it may achieve something that man could only do with thought and strategy, all for its welfare and nourishment; and so that you may know that God is the Designer of all this.

Consider the marvels of the silkworm and the astounding wonders of its creation, and remember God when you behold them. This worm was created purely for the benefit and welfare of mankind, for silk is made from its body. After the larva hatches from the egg, it is placed on a mulberry leaf to feed until it has grown, whereupon it spins itself into a silk cocoon until it is entirely enclosed within it, becoming a body devoid of life. But then behold how the Almighty Creator preserves this species: when it is done weaving the cocoon and that body [which it had] decays, God transforms it into a tiny flying creature resembling a bee. These creatures are then gathered on a mat or the like, seemingly of uniform appearance without any visible characteristics to tell males from females. The males then cover the females and spend a moment on their backs, and they instantly conceive and lay eggs like those from which they hatched to begin with. They then fly off and have no further use, since they have already fulfilled their function, which is to produce those eggs.

Ask yourself who inspired them to feed on those leaves until they are nourished, and then to spin themselves into cocoons of

silk until they are completely enclosed in them, and then gave them wings and transformed them into a form that allowed the males and females to come together to reproduce. If they remained in their original form, they would never be able to come together in that way. Consider also how the Creator allowed human beings to make use of the substance that these worms spin, and to make from it great wealth and clothing of high quality and beauty. Behold His wondrous subjugation of this curious creature, in which He manifests His astounding handiwork, design, and wisdom, as well as proofs and symbols of the resurrection of the dead and the reconstruction of bones. Glory be to Him! There is no god but He, the Sublime, the Magnificent.

Consider also the fly, and how it is equipped with what it needs to obtain its sustenance. It was created with wings that swiftly bear it towards what it needs and away from harm, and endowed with six legs—four to stand upon, and the front two for cleaning itself of dust—for its wings are delicate and its large prominent eyes are lidless. This creature and others like it are closely connected to mankind, constantly disturbing them and alighting upon them. In this way the Almighty Creator reminds them of the lowliness of this world, so that they may disdain it and think little of parting with it. This is another way in which He manifests His wisdom to them.

Contemplate the many tiny creatures which seem to turn to stone when you touch them, becoming completely motionless and remaining that way for a long spell, before suddenly moving on their way. This can only be because things are only hunted when they show signs of life, and if they appear to be inanimate objects they are left alone just as any stone is. Consider an eagle hunting a tortoise. It appears to it like a rock without anything edible upon it, so it grabs it in its talons and flies up high above the earth, then lets it fall upon rocky ground so that the fall breaks its shell, and then the eagle falls upon it and consumes it. Behold how it

is inspired with the knowledge of how to obtain its sustenance, though it does not possess intellect or reason.

Consider the crow, and how because it is unpopular with humans it was created with a cautious temperament in order to preserve itself, as though it somehow knows that someone is after it. It was inspired to hide its nest cunningly to protect its chicks; and it does not let itself be overly distracted by females, lest it drop its guard. This is why one rarely sees male and female crows together. That is how it always behaves around intelligent beings, but with dumb beasts it behaves entirely differently, standing on their backs and feeding on their blood and dung. When it finds food, it eats its fill and buries the rest to return for it later. Who but God could have created it with such a nature and marvelous design, though it does not possess intellect or reason?

The kite is another unpopular bird that protects itself through its ability to fly fast and high, as well as possessing keen eyesight allowing it to obtain sustenance. It can see potential food on the ground when it is high in the air, and quickly dive upon it. It is inspired with the ability to tell whether a person is coming or going, and so it can pilfer things from people behind their backs, but it does not try to do so from the front lest it be spotted and prevented. It is aided in this regard by its hook-like talons, which almost never drop what they hold. Glory be to the All-Wise Designer!

Consider the design of the chameleon. It was created slow-moving, yet since it needs to find sustenance it was given a marvelous form, created with eyes that can turn in every direction without needing to move the body so that it can remain as still as stone, as though it were not a living creature at all. In addition, it can change its color to that of the tree on which it sits so that it is camouflaged. Then when a fly or some other suitable prey approaches, it sticks out its tongue and snatches it as quick as a flash, then blends into the tree once more. God gave it an unusual tongue that can

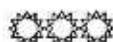
reach three spans or more, and subjugated to it prey that come within that distance. If it sees something threatening, it changes its appearance to something that the threatening creature fears or dislikes. All of these means have been created for it to compensate for its slow movement.

Consider also the animal known as the monitor lizard, and the cunning and subtlety in hunting with which it is endowed. When it senses that a fly has landed nearby, it lies completely still as though it were a stone until it senses that the fly is unsuspecting. Then it crawls towards it extremely slowly so as not to frighten it off, until once it is in reach it pounces and seizes it. It then wraps its whole body around it so it does not get away, and keeps its grip on it until it completely ceases to move; it then consumes it at its leisure. Behold how it was created with such cunning in order to obtain its provision. Glory be to the All-Wise Creator!

Consider also the gnat, which God made so weak and tiny and yet used for a parable in His Book.ⁱ Do you find it to be lacking anything that it needs for its welfare? It has wings for flying, legs for standing, eyes for spying its food, and organs for digesting it and excreting its waste. Could it live without sustenance? Could it ingest its food without having a channel for it, or excrete its waste without another? Consider how the Almighty designed it and shaped it, measuring out its parts and providing it with knowledge of what is good and bad for it. All this is evidence of His knowledge, power, and abounding wisdom. The gnat is tiny to the eye, yet even if all the inhabitants of heaven and earth, the angels, and all of creation together desired to know how the Creator apportioned its parts and balanced its form, they would be unable to do so. They could only express their inability to know the true

i Truly God does not disdain to set forth a parable even of a gnat, or anything besides it (Qur'ān 2:26).

nature of this. And if they gathered together and considered how exactly it was that the gnat came to know that blood lies beneath skin, and that this is where it must obtain its sustenance—for if it did not know this, it would not feed upon blood—or how it knows how to fly to the places where its Lord told it its food could be found, or how it is able to hear the sound of incoming threats, they would never be able to discover how it was. Even if they cut it apart and examined it, they would only become all the more blind and ignorant about it. Such is the divine wisdom and power inherent in the gnat. What, then, of the rest of His creatures? Glory be to Him, Exalted is He!





CHAPTER 13

THE WISDOM IN THE CREATION OF FISH

*He it is Who subjected the sea, that you
may eat from it fresh meat.*

(QUR'ĀN 16:14)

Consider and reflect upon the life-forms of various shapes and sizes that God Almighty created in the seas and rivers, and the clear signs inherent in them. Since He made water their habitat, He did not give them legs or lungs, for they would not walk but live immersed in water. In place of legs He created for them strong fins at their sides with which to move as they pleased. He covered their skin with strong scales linked like chain mail to protect them from threats and harm. For some fish He did not create those interlinked scales, but instead gave them sturdy thick skin to fulfill the same purpose. He also created for them sight, hearing, smell, and everything else they needed to obtain sustenance and avoid harm. And since He knew that some of them are food for others, He made them very numerous, and made most kinds of them bear young regardless of sex, rather than making it so that

only females bear young and not males as it is for land animals. Instead He made males and females a single sex who conceive a huge number of young at a time, so that a single member of the species produces countless offspring from one spawning. Then there are other kinds of fish that are spontaneously created in rivers and elsewhere without any act of procreation, again with a huge number being created all at once. Other [types of aquatic] species reproduce by mating between males and females and have front and back legs, such as turtles and crocodiles. They lay eggs that warm in the sun until they hatch, whereupon a single member of the species emerges from each egg.

And since the Almighty knew that the fish in the sea cannot raise their young after they lay them, He casts the spirit all at once into the spawn when it emerges, whereupon each one is fully formed and independent and has no need for parental nurture to complete its creation. Consider this wisdom and kindness: since the sea does not allow for childrearing or nurture of any kind, He makes the offspring independent so that they do not need it. He also makes them very numerous because they provide food for other fish as well as for human beings and birds, and so there need to be many of them.

Consider also the swiftness with which they move, though they lack the means of self-propulsion that other animals have. Observe how they move their tails, which are articulated for the purpose, and how they keep them balanced like the rudder of a ship. The fins at their sides are like sails, also providing balance and direction, making the fish resemble a sailing vessel. Their bones are like the frame on which they are built, each bone placed in the manner that suits the relevant body part, just as a ship is built, with the spine running down the center to hold everything in place and the bones of the ribs, back, and head stemming from it in the manner that best serves its constitution.

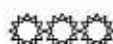
Consider how predatory fish are aided in their pursuit of sustenance by their hard flesh, swift movement, and plentiful teeth ensuring that one bite is enough to accomplish the task and obviate the need for chewing.

Consider the weak and almost motionless life-forms that God has created in the sea, such as the different kinds of shellfish and snail, and how He has protected them by creating them with shells hard as stone to protect them and serve as their dwellings, while making their bodies as soft as can be. Some of their shells are so narrow that there is no way of getting into them. Others have more open shells that would not be protection enough on their own, but God gave them the ability to cling onto solid rock so tightly that it is extremely difficult to pull them off, and they can extract nourishment from the moisture on the rock to which they cling. Other crustaceans have star-shaped shells. They put out their heads to graze, but at the slightest sign of danger they quickly retreat into their homes and close them up tight with a seal that is almost as hard as the shell itself, so that they seem to disappear without trace. Observe this divine kindness and how God does not neglect anything, and know that God protects what dwells in the seas, hills, and mountains. *Hallowed be He Who gave to everything its own nature, then guided* (Qur'ān 20:50).

Consider the species of fish that feeds near the shore as well as down in the depths of the sea, and how God created an ink-like liquid inside it that is created from its nourishment in a manner similar to how milk is created in the udder. When it feels threatened, it squirts out this ink to obscure its surroundings and then makes its escape, leaving no sign of where it has gone. God gave it this means of protecting itself, as well as placing other benefits therein which are known only to their Creator.

Consider another type of fish, which was given wings like those of a bat, allowing it to leap above the surface of the water, such

that a person unfamiliar with it might mistake it for a sea bird. Or think of that frail species of fish that is often found in rivers, which God has protected with the ability to afflict anyone who tries to seize it with an intoxicant that prevents them from getting hold of it. Many books could be filled with descriptions of God's wisdom in any one of His creations, and mankind could never hope to list them all. The little that is known of any one species is astounding enough on its own.





CHAPTER 14

THE WISDOM IN THE CREATION OF PLANTS

*What of Him Who created the heavens and the earth, and sends
down for you water from the heaven, whereby We make
grow splendid gardens whose trees you could
never make grow? Is there a god beside
God? No, but they are folk
who ascribe equals.*

(QUR'ĀN 27:60)

Consider, may God grant you success and true guidance, all the plants upon the earth of unrivalled beauty and splendor, and how the Creator has endowed them with countless benefits, flavors, fragrances, and uses. He created the seed and the stone to preserve plant species, and made their fruits a source of nourishment and enjoyment. He made grasses for grazing, kindling for fires, and wood for construction, shipbuilding, and many other purposes. He made leaves, petals, roots, trunks, branches, and sap, all of which have countless uses. If fruit were simply found upon the ground instead of growing from these plants, think of all the benefit

that would be lost: no wood for fires or carpentry, no fodder for livestock, and so on, even if the fruit could still be consumed and enjoyed.

Consider also the blessing that God places in plants, such that a single grain may lead to the production of a hundred grains or more. The wisdom in this blessed increase is that it allows us to obtain our sustenance while keeping some aside for storage or sowing. It is like a king who wishes for his kingdom to thrive, and so gives his subjects enough grain to sow as well as extra to live off until their crops grow. Such is the wisdom that God distributes across the land for the welfare of His servants. Trees and palms, too, produce extra fruit, so that an immense yield can come from a single seed and provide people with enough to eat and utilize as they require, as well as extras for storing and planting. This ensures that the species of those plants will endure and not become extinct; if they did not grow and leave something to replace themselves, any loss they suffered would be devastating.

Reflect on these seeds and how they emerge in containers that resemble leather bags, keeping them safe until they develop, just as the placenta keeps a fetus safe. Other seeds and grains emerge from hard shells with teeth-like spikes to protect them from birds. Consider how seeds are protected with this armor, preventing birds from taking them; for although birds do obtain nourishment from them, human beings have greater need of them.

Consider the wisdom in the creation of trees and other plants. They are in need of regular nourishment just as animals are, but they have neither the ability to move towards it nor the implements to grasp it. Instead, they put down roots in the soil to draw water from it, nourishing the roots and also the upper parts of it: branches, leaves, and fruit. The earth thereby becomes like its nursing mother and its roots become the mouths that she feeds, suckling it as animals suckle their young. The posts of tents and

pavilions are held in place by ropes on all sides so that they stand straight without falling or leaning. The same is true of all plants, whose roots spread in the soil on all sides to hold them firm. But for this, tall trees would not be able to stand, especially in strong winds. Behold how the wisdom of the Creator precedes the wisdom of human craft, and how people emulate the wisdom of God's handiwork in their own.

Reflect on the creation of leaves. Close inspection shows that there are veins running through the leaf. Some are thick, running across their width and length; others are fine, running across those thicker ones, stitched together wondrously. If they were man-made, it would take a long time to finish the leaves of a single tree, and it would require delicate instruments and careful work. Yet within a short time, enough trees to cover plains, mountains, and valleys can grow without any instruments or labor at all, simply through the power, will, and wisdom of the Creator. Observe how those veins run through the leaf in order to transmit water and nourishment to it, like the veins that course through the human body delivering nourishment to each part. The larger veins keep the leaf firmly in place so that it does not fall apart.

Consider also the stones and pips inside fruits, placed there so that they may fulfill their purpose later if they cannot be planted immediately for some reason, like a precious treasure that lies buried until it needs to be unearthed. If there is some problem with the planting in one place, replacements can be brought from elsewhere. The pit is hard, allowing it to cling tightly to the soft fruit around it; otherwise, it would be released too soon and spoil. Some of them contain seeds that can be eaten or used for oil and other useful things. Then consider the dates that God creates around the stones, or the grapes around the pips, and the food and pleasure they provide to humanity. Reflect on the creation of these stones and pips and the wondrous potential placed in them, such

as those that produce living beings when placed in water, which is a secret whose true nature is known only to God Almighty; and even the part that is known to us would take too long to explain.

Consider also how seeds and pips are protected by the hard husk that is created around them so that when they fall to the ground they do not spoil too soon, and they can be stored safely until planting season. The outer husk protects what is inside it like a precious item stored in a box. When it is placed in the ground and watered, a shoot grows out of the stone and climbs towards the sky, and a root grows downwards at the same time to transmit nourishment to the shoot. As the stem grows stronger, the branches are protected from being blown away or broken by movement, and the water rises from the roots to the top of the tree, apportioned by God's decree and true balance. The leaves receive the nourishment that is appropriate for them and for the veins that snake through them, and so do the branches, fruits, stems, blossoms, and flowers, each as it needs. This continues until the fruits reach their full development in size, flavor, scent, color, and sweetness, in all their varieties.

Consider also how God Almighty decrees that the leaves emerge before the fruit, because the fruit is vulnerable when it first emerges and would be harmed by the sun's heat and the air's cold if it did not have the leaves to shelter it. The gaps between the leaves still allow the sun and air to reach the fruit, for it cannot do without them altogether since they protect it from mold, fungus, and other blights.

Consider also how the Creator, Incomparably Perfect is He, arranged the trees, fruits, and flowers and gave them a great variety of colors, shapes, tastes, and scents. Some are tall, others short; some mighty, others lowly. They range in color from red to white, and from yellow to green, in every imaginable shade, and in taste from sweet to sour, tangy to bitter. Their scents cover an

extensive range of pleasant aromas. The Glorious Book refers to this many times, providing comfort to the heart and food for thought. Consider how the Almighty Creator provides man with pleasure when looking upon them, for they cleanse and invigorate the heart and gladden the soul with their splendor. God has placed in them countless benefits with a variety of effects; some strengthen the heart, others provide nourishment that sustain life. He made them delicious and pleasant to eat, and created seeds in them to preserve their species, so that if they dry up and lose their ripeness they can be planted.

Reflect upon the Words of God Most High, *And a tree that issues forth from Mount Sinai, producing oil and seasoning for those who eat* (Qur'ān 23:20). From between rock and water the Almighty brings forth pure oil that is beneficial as well as delicious, just as He brings forth milk from between blood and dung, and brings forth from bees honey, *a drink of diverse hues, wherein there is healing for mankind* (Qur'ān 16:69). If all of them were gathered in one place, they would be like rivers, all for the benefit of humanity. Consider the lessons inherent in this, for those who have the minds to discern them.

Consider also the water that rises from the firm roots to the top of the tree, and how the Creator distributes the nourishment of the palm tree, giving the trunk what it needs and the fronds what they need for their welfare, and sending to the fruit what best suits it, as well as the fibers that protect the roots as well as the fruit. And He makes the fruit, which is vulnerable to begin with, bunch together in groups, each one coated with a husk to protect it from blights and other harm. Then when it is strong enough to emerge into the sun and the air, the protecting husk gradually breaks away from it, splitting bit by bit to allow the fruit to receive whatever amount of the sun and air it can bear until it is at full strength, when it emerges completely unto the open without the

risk of being harmed by heat or cold. You then see it ripen until it reaches the purpose for which it is intended, when it becomes enjoyable to eat and can be stored or utilized appropriately.

The same is true of other types of tree, each of which display their own means of preservation and subtle handiwork for any intelligent mind to behold. One example of this is the marvelous design inherent in the creation of the pomegranate. You can observe the collected flesh at its sides, wide at the base and thin at the top like a hill or a building with a wide base to keep it stable. The fruit almost appears to have been assembled by hand, except that no hand could link the seeds inside that flesh so expertly. You can observe how it is divided into segments, each separated by delicate strands and woven together with marvelous precision so that the seeds are kept apart and do not fuse together and spoil. These seeds are surrounded by a thick husk that keeps this all together. One aspect of the wisdom of this arrangement is that if the seeds were all bunched together without these partitions, they would not be able to receive the necessary nutrition, and so He placed this flesh between them in order to ensure they are all fed. Observe how the seeds are planted in that flesh, drawing from it through tiny delicate veins that transmit the nourishment to the seeds. Their fragility prevents them from adulterating the food they transmit. Consider also how sweet the fruit is despite drawing its nourishment from sources that are exceedingly bitter. The fibers around the seeds also protect them by preventing them from shaking around. The whole thing is further protected by the thick skin, which is also very bitter, protecting it from blights. Mankind receive many benefits from this type of plant, both food and medicine; and since there is need for these outside the season when they are harvested, this design allows them to be saved for later. Consider also the tree on which the pomegranate fruit grows, and how it was created to be strong

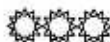
and sturdy so that the fruit can fully develop without falling too soon; and this fruit is exclusively for man, and no other animal.

Consider also the plants that grow directly upon the ground, such as melons and pumpkins, and the design inherent in them. The stalk of these plants is supple and delicate and requires a lot of water to grow, and so its produce grows directly on the ground. If they had to stand up straight like other trees, they would not be able to carry their fruit with such delicate stalks, and the fruit would fall before it was fully developed. Instead it remains on the ground until it is mature, and the ground carries the fruit as well as the stalk while the roots supply them with water.

Reflect on how these fruits each grow in the time that is best for them and for those who utilize them, providing assistance to them when they need it. If they arrived during cold weather, people would shrink from them and they would cause harm to most of those who ate them.

Consider also how since female date palms must be pollinated, God created in them the male part that they require, so that the male part of the palm is akin to the male animal, allowing them to be cultivated to preserve their species.

Consider also the extraordinary medicinal properties contained in plants. Some churn in the body to allow the excretion of built-up waste; others expel black bile, phlegm, yellow bile, or wind; others settle the stomach or heal diarrhea, vomiting, or wind; others cure sickness or weakness. And all of this was created from water—glory be to Him Who designed His kingdom with such beauty and order!





CHAPTER 15

THE HEART EXULTS IN THE GLORY OF GOD

*The seven heavens and the earth and all that is therein glorify Him,
and there is nothing that does not glorify Him with
praise, though you do not understand their
glorification. Truly He is Forbearing,
Much-Forgiving
(QUR'ĀN 17:44)*

*The heavens are almost rent asunder from above, and
the angels glorify their Lord with praise and ask
forgiveness for those on earth
(QUR'ĀN 42:5)*

*And the thunder glorifies Him with praise,
as do the angels in awe of Him
(QUR'ĀN 13:13)*

Know, may God grace you and all of us with success, that all of the wonders, marvels, and wisdoms of God's creation we have

described so far in this book are clear signs and manifest proofs of the majesty, omnipotence, and magnificence of their Creator. Yet if you look to the nearest thing to you, your own self, you will see wonders and signs therein that are every bit as marvelous, and greater still. Look then to your abode, the earth, and contemplate it, and set your mind to comprehending all of the things He has placed within it and upon it: the towering mountains, the vast seas, the flowing rivers, the varieties of plants and trees, the animals, and all the rest that provokes reflection in all those who have minds to think. Consider its vast dimensions, and recognize that mankind could never hope to attain comprehensive knowledge of every part of it. But then consider what the scholars tell us about the size of the heavens compared to this world, and how the earth compared to the heavens is like a tiny ring lying upon the floor of a vast desert. Scientists tell us that the sun is over one hundred and sixty times the size of the earth, and that there are stars more than a hundred times the size of it. And the sky contains all of these celestial bodies—the sun, moon, and stars—so think of how vast the sky itself must be. Consider how you are able to see the sun, moon, stars, and sky with the tiny pupil of your eye. From that you may grasp how immense is their height and their distance from you, making them appear tiny from your perspective. Consider also how fast they must be moving, though they seem motionless to you because they are so distant. In fact, you should be in no doubt that a celestial body may move a distance equivalent to a hundred or more times the span of the earth in a brief moment without your noticing it. Contemplate the vast size of these things, and recall the oaths which your Glorious Lord swears in several places in the Qur'ān, saying: *By the sky full of constellations* (Qur'ān 85:1); *By the heaven and the Night Visitor! And what shall convey to you what is the Night Visitor? The piercing star* (Qur'ān 86:1-3);

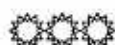
Nay, I swear by the setting-places of the stars—and truly it is a tremendous oath, if you only knew (Qur'ān 56:75-76), and so on.

Then turn your attention to the higher world of the angels and the magnificent creation therein. Consider what Gabriel ʾ told the Prophet ﷺ about Isrāfil ʾ: "If only you could see Isrāfil with the Throne upon his back, his feet upon the depths of the earth!"¹ Greater still are the Words of the Almighty: *His Footstool extends over the heavens and the earth* (Qur'ān 2:255). What do you imagine of a creation that could extend over all this vastness? Turn your attention then to your Glorious Creator, and see in this immense creation proof of His own vastness, majesty, omnipotence, knowledge, will, and wisdom in His creation. Consider how all this mighty handiwork stands in place without any pillars to support it or cords from above from which to suspend it. Anyone who contemplates the realms of heaven and earth with his mind and heart will attain knowledge of his Lord and reverence for His Command, that being the inevitable consequence for thinking people. Whenever the enlightened intellect turns to reflect upon the marvels of creation, its knowledge and certainty about, and submissiveness towards, its Creator will grow and strengthen. In this regard mankind have differing levels, according to the light of intellect and guidance that is granted to each of them. The greatest of all keys to these blessings is reciting the Glorious Book while seeking to understand what it says and contemplate its signs, always maintaining one's consciousness of God, Infinitely Perfect is He.

This is the key to knowledge of God and certainty of what He has in His keeping. Ponder all that we have said here, for you know that the Messenger of God ﷺ was carried up until he reached the Farthest Boundary and *saw the greatest of the Signs of his Lord* (Qur'ān 53:18), and was shown His Dominions. He realized the true reality of this world and the Next, and drew so near to his Lord that he was *two bows' length away, or nearer* (Qur'ān 53:9).

How vast must have been the knowledge of the one who was graced with such a station and then was commanded: *Say, 'My Lord, increase me in knowledge!'* (Qur'ān 20:114).

May God grace you with His knowledge, and favor you with the light of His guidance, and utilize you and all of us in obedience to Him. May He make us all people of saintly allegiance to Him, by His grace, generosity, and kindness. Truly that is His to bestow.





EPISTLE OF THE BIRDS

Risālat al-Ṭayr





*In the Name of God,
the All-Merciful, the Most Merciful*

Once upon a time, the birds held a great gathering attended by all their various species, and decided that they could not do without a king. They agreed that none were suitable for that honor except the Phoenix,ⁱ who, they had been informed, had his home in the western lands and its nest on a certain island. Compelled by their yearning and desire to fulfill their task, they resolved to set out for that place and to seek shade there, to gather in his courtyard and seek the happy destiny of serving him. They sang:

Come with us to Laylā'sⁱⁱ house to give greetings,
Yes, and to ask them about one of the household.

Thereupon, the feeling of yearning they had harbored in their hearts burst forth and cried out, beseeching:

In which part of the world can I hope to reach you,
When you are kings who can't be looked for anywhere?

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- i The '*anqā*', or *simurgh* in Persian, is a mythical bird said to hail from Mount Qāf, a mountain of great cosmic significance in Middle Eastern lore. Its nearest analogue in Western mythology is the phoenix.
- ii Laylā, a name associated with the Arab tale of Laylā and Majnūn which is retold in the famous Persian allegorical poem by Nizāmī. Laylā, meaning 'Night' symbolizes in Sufism the mysterious divine Presence.

Then a herald of the Unseen called out from behind the veils, "*Do not hurl yourselves into ruin with your own hands* (Qur'ān 2:195)! Remain where you are, and do not move; if you leave your homelands you will only double your woes. Beware of throwing yourselves into tribulation and destruction so readily."

Safety from Su'dāⁱ and from her neighbor
Lies in not going close to her country.

Yet when they heard this declaration from the unseen Realm of Dominion excusing them from their quest, their yearning, anxiety, confusion, and restlessness only grew stronger. They cried out together in unison:

Whatever any doctor prescribes for you,
There is no cure for you but Laylā's words.

For, so they claimed:

A lover, and somebody whose house falls down on him:
nothing makes them contented, or can bring them repose.

Then they became smitten with longing and reckless purpose, and in their excited state they had no hesitation in pursuing their quest. They were warned "Ahead of you lie perilous wastes, towering mountains, fathomless oceans, and extremities of cold and heat—obstacles that can only spell failure or death. Better by far to remain safely at home in your nests, and not let wild ambition

i Su'dā, another female name, can symbolize base desire, the perils of the spiritual path, or any kind of ambition that spells danger.

lead you into ruin." But they would not listen or pay heed. Instead they set out, singing:

One who has no close friends in any country
Will find few helpers when his goal is mighty.

Each of them mounted the steed of aspiration, harnessed with yearning and sustained by passionate love, singing :

See my camel crossing the valley floor,
Moving hard and fast beneath the reins.
When it complains of the wearying journey,
It takes heart when I promise a joyous arrival.
Your face gives it light to show the way;
At its heels, Your favor sings to urge it along.

Thus they departed the road of free will and were drawn into the realm of compulsion. Those who were natives of hot lands perished in the frigid regions, and those who were natives of cold lands died in the hot regions. Still they went on, pelted by thunderbolts and pummeled by storms, until finally the few who were left arrived at the King's island, where they alighted upon his courtyard and sought shade in his presence.

They enquired after the King, and were informed that he was ensconced in the most impenetrable fortress in his majestic private grounds. Word of their coming was taken to him, and he sent one of his retinue to ask them why they had come. They replied, "We have come to make you our king." But the King sent this reply: "You have wasted your time! We are your king whether you like it or not, and your king we would remain whether you came to us or not. We have no need of you."

When they saw how fruitless their journey had been, they became despondent with shame and mortification, overwhelmed with bewilderment, and dazzled with awe. "We cannot return home," they said, "for all our strength is spent, and only weakness remains. All we can hope for is to be left to die here on this island, every last one of us." They sang:

Dwellers of the desert, can you entertain
A frugal guest the night has brought in?
He needs no provisions, if you can offer
A kind regard and friendly banter.

In this wretched state, beset by sickness and on death's door, all they could do was pray.

Drunk and delirious on passion's cup,
Each one became his brother's nurse.

But as they were sunk in despair and acute depression, a breeze of hope stirred in their midst and they heard someone say, "Come now! There is no cause to despair! *Truly none lose hope in God's comfort but people who are lost* (Qur'ān 12:87). Although Our total lack of need required Us to make Ourselves inaccessible and turn you back, Our beautiful generosity obliges us now to extend to you indulgence and welcome. Now that you have realized the extent of your inability to know Our magnificence, it is only proper that We offer you shelter. This is the house of generosity, the abode of bliss! It seeks out the poor who have left behind a life of predictability. Were that not so, the Master and Foremost of All would not have said, 'Let me live in poverty' (Ibn Mājah 5126). Only those who are aware of their lack of merit truly deserve admission into the company of the Phoenix King!"

Thus were the birds consoled after having despaired, and revitalized after having sorrowed. Trusting in the outpouring of generosity, and feeling secure in the flow of grace, they enquired after their fallen companions: "What of those who failed to cross the wastes and the valleys? Was their blood shed in vain, or may it be compensated?"

The reply came: "What of them, indeed! *Whoever goes forth from his home as an emigrant to God and His Messenger, and then death overtakes him, his wage will fall upon God* (Qur'ān 4:100). The hands of fate chose them after the scourge of tribulation smote them. *And do not call those slain in God's cause 'dead.' No, they are living, but you cannot perceive* (Qur'ān 2:154)."

Said the birds: "And what of those who drowned in the depths of the sea and were never cast back onto dry land?"

The reply came: "What of them, indeed! *Do not count those who were slain in God's cause as dead. No, they are alive* (Qur'ān 3:169). The One Who made them and caused them to die has given them life anew. The One Who stirred the yearning in all of you, so that you braved suffering and death in pursuit of your quest, has summoned them, carried them hence, and brought them near. They are amidst the veils of glory, the curtains of power, *In a seat of sincerity, before an All-Powerful Sovereign* (Qur'ān 54:55)."

Said the birds: "Is there any way that we may behold them?"

The reply came: "No, for you are amidst the veils of [divine] glory and the curtains of humanity; you are prisoners of the lifespan, caught in its fetters. When the time comes for you to leave your nests and meet your fates, then you shall see one another once more."

They said, "What of those who never joined us on the quest, but remained behind out of spite or negligence?"

The reply came: "What of them? *Had they desired to go forth, they would have made some preparation for it; but God was averse*

that they should be sent forth, so He held them back (Qur'ān 9:46). Had we wanted them, we would have summoned them; but we did not want them, so we rejected them. Did you come by yourselves, or did we summon you? Did you yearn, or did we? We were concerned for you, and so we carried you all across land and sea."

When they heard this and received the consolation of perfect nurture and sufficiency, their joy was perfected and their trust made whole. They became tranquil, and the subtle mysteries of stability allowed them to receive the truths of certitude. In their continual tranquility they left behind all mutability. *And you will come to know the truth of it in due course* (Qur'ān 38:88).



Consider this: is there a difference between someone who returns to that island and someone who visits it for the first time? Only a newcomer would say, "We have come to our king." As for one who is returning to his original life—*O soul at peace, return!* (Qur'ān 89:28–29)—because he has heard the summons to return, how could such a person be asked, "Why have you come?" For he could rightly reply, "Why was I summoned?" Indeed, he could rightly ask, "Why have I been borne to this land, the land of blessed nearness?" The reply depends upon the question, and the question depends upon the degree of comprehension; and concerns depend upon aspirations.

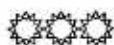


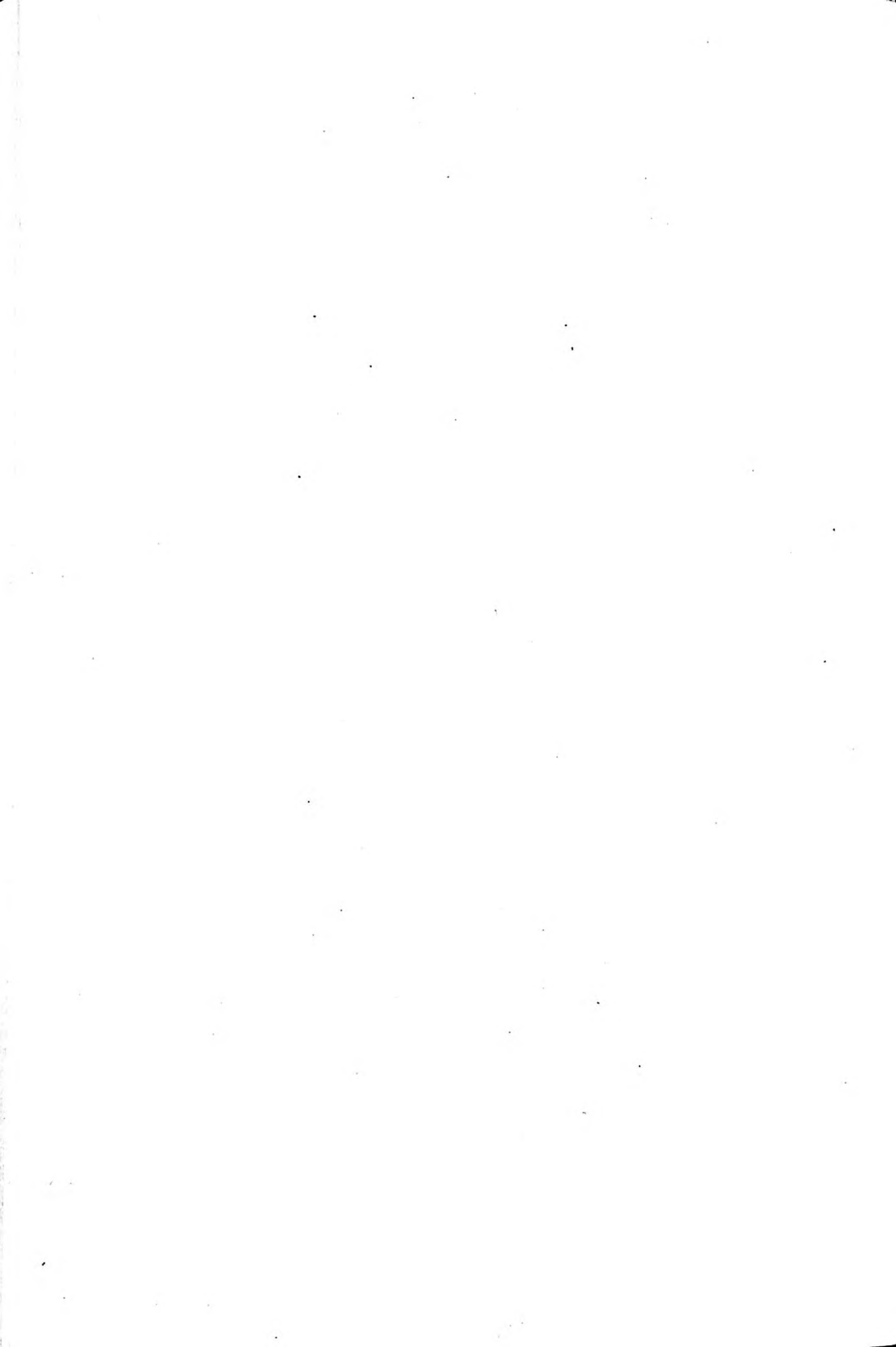
Anyone who wishes to profit from such sayings must renew his covenant with the Way of the Birds and the virtues of the spirit; for none can comprehend the language of the birds but one who is from their kingdom. The way to renew this covenant is to maintain

continual ritual purity, observe the proper times of ritual prayer, and devote a regular hour to solitary invocation. That is how the covenant is renewed and made fresh after lapses into heedlessness. There are but two paths from which to choose: *Remember Me, and I will remember you* (Qur'ān 2:152), or *They have forgotten God, so He has forgotten them* (Qur'ān 9:67). For those who follow the way of remembrance, "I am the Companion of the one who remembers Me."¹ For those who follow the way of forgetfulness, *Whoever turns a blind eye to the remembrance of the All-Merciful, We assign to him a devil who becomes his companion* (Qur'ān 43:36).

With every breath, the Son of Adam chooses between one of the two; and on the Day of Resurrection, he will bear one of two marks: either *The guilty shall be known by their mark* (Qur'ān 55:41), or *Their mark is on their faces from the effect of prostration* (Qur'ān 48:29).

May God save you by His enabling grace, guide you to the realization of truth, and shorten for you the path, which He alone can do. Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds, and may God bless our master Muḥammad and all his Family. Amen.

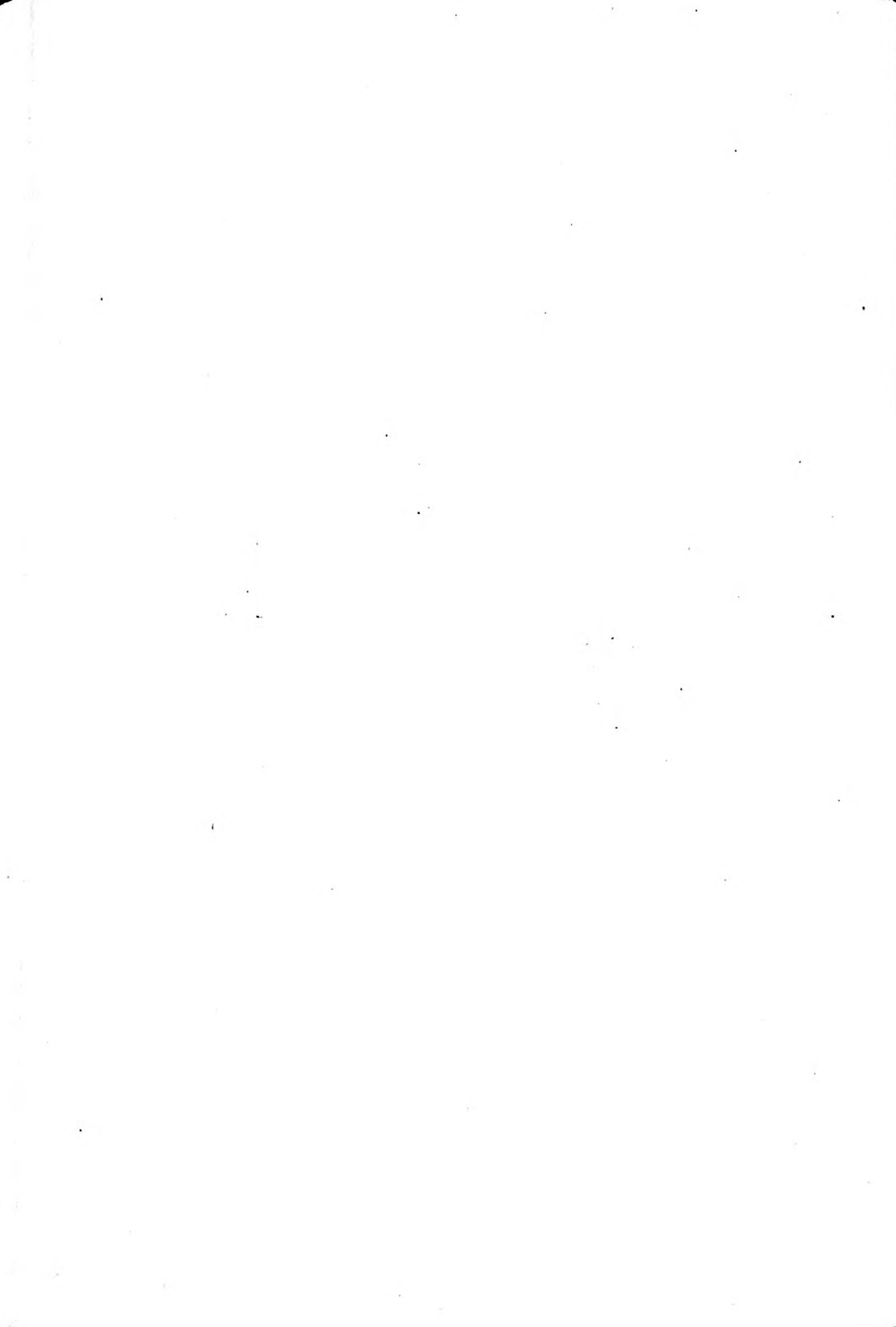






IMAM AL-GHAZĀLĪ ON
COSMOLOGICAL QUESTIONS

*al-Ajwiba al-Ghazāliyya fī
al-masā'il al-ukhrawiyya*





*In the Name of God,
the All-Merciful, the Most Merciful*

The great shaykh and ascetic imam, the Proof of Islam, the Glory of the Faith, the Leader of the Community, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, may God sanctify his spirit and illuminate his tomb, was asked about the meaning of the Almighty's Words, *So when I have shaped him and breathed into him of My Spirit...* (Qur'ān 38:72). What is this "shaping" (*taswiya*), and what is this "breathing" (*nafkh*), and what is the spirit (*rūh*)?

The Shaping

He answered: The shaping was an act performed upon the receptacle of the spirit, which in the case of Adam ﷺ was the clay, and in the case of his progeny was the drop of fluid. This act was a purification and a balancing of the humors. Fire will not burn something that is entirely dry such as dust or stone, nor something that is entirely moist like water, but can only burn objects that are composed of dryness and moisture together—and not even all of those, for clay is composed in that manner, yet does not catch fire. It is only after the dense clay is repeatedly transformed by processes of creation, until it becomes delicate vegetation, that fire is able to burn it. Likewise, God creates clay and makes it pass through one process of creation after another until it becomes vegetation, and then humans eat it and it becomes blood. The composite energy

in every animal then draws purity from the blood, which is closest to equilibrium, and becomes a drop of fluid that is deposited in the womb, where it blends with the female fluid and becomes further balanced. The womb then enfolds it in its warmth so that its potential increases until it reaches the limit of purity and its parts are as perfectly balanced as can be. It is then that it is ready to receive and retain the spirit, just as when a wick is soaked in oil it becomes ready to receive and retain the fire. When the fluid drop is completely balanced and purified, it is in a fit state to come under the control of a spirit. And since the Generous Lord gives each thing what it deserves, and allows it to receive that for which it is prepared, to the extent of its capacity for it without holding back or being parsimonious, this spirit then emanates into it. "Shaping," then, is the term for these successive acts that are performed upon the origin of the fluid drop, the stages through which it passes on its course to the purity of wholeness and equilibrium.

The Breathing

"Breathing" is the term denoting the kindling of the light of the spirit in the wick of the fluid drop. Breathing has a specific form and function. Its form is the expulsion of air from the lungs into the receptacle, and its function is the kindling of fire in the fuel. The breathing is the cause, and the kindling is the effect. Now this form of breathing is inconceivable for God Most High in a literal sense, but the effect is not. Sometimes the cause of a particular effect may be used figuratively to denote the act that leads to it, though the act and the figurative cause do not share the same form. He says, for example, *Exalted is He, God is wrathful towards them* (Qur'ān 58:14), and *We exacted retribution from them* (Qur'ān 7:136). Now, "wrath" means a kind of alarming change in an angry person that results in harm or destruction for the object of

his anger, and so this must be a figure of speech alluding to the consequence of the wrath. The same applies to His wrath, which really signifies the consequence of wrath. Just so, the "breathing" of the spirit signifies the consequence of breathing, though the act does not have the same form.

Question: What exactly is the cause that makes the light of the spirit catch fire in the wick of a sperm-drop?

Answer: It is an attribute of the Agent, and a corresponding attribute of the receptacle. The attribute of the Agent is the divine Generosity, which is the wellspring of existence for everything that has the potential to receive it. It is an intrinsic emanation upon every reality that He brings into existence. This attribute can be called "power" (*qudra*). It is analogous to the way sunlight emanates upon everything that is receptive to light when there is no barrier between them. Opaque objects possess receptivity to light, while air, which is colorless [and transparent], does not.

The attribute of the receptacle is the wholeness and equilibrium that result from the divine shaping, as God says: *when I have shaped him*. It is akin to polishing metal. If a mirror is coated with rust, it will not reflect the image of what faces it. But the more it is polished, the more it will begin to reflect that image, until finally it is displayed in it clearly. In the same way, when the fluid drop is perfectly shaped, the spirit will be placed within it by the Creator of the spirit, without the Creator undergoing any change. The only reason the spirit appears in it at that moment is that the receptacle has changed and become ready to receive it, when before it was not, just as the image appears to suddenly show up in the mirror when in fact it was already there and underwent no change. It was not visible in the mirror before—not because it was unable to be reflected there, but because the mirror had not yet been sufficiently burnished to reflect it.

Question: What is emanation (*ḥayd*)?

Answer: The term *fayḍ* here should not be understoodⁱ in the sense of water pouring from a cup onto one's hand, for that denotes a part of the water leaving the cup and then coming into contact with the hand. Instead one must understand it in the sense of sunlight emanating upon a wall. Some err in their understanding of sunlight, too, for they think that the rays detach from the substance of the sun and then travel to the wall and spread over it, which is not the case. In fact, the light of the sun causes the engendering of something upon the opaque wall that shares its luminous property but is weaker than it, as the image of the object emanates upon the mirror. When a person is reflected in a mirror, it is not that a part of him breaks away from him and attaches to the mirror; what happens is that his image causes a corresponding image to appear in the mirror that faces him. There is no detachment or attachment, but only causality. Just so, the divine Generosity causes the light of existence to appear in every entity that is capable of existing; and this is what is called emanation.

The Spirit

Question: You have spoken of the shaping and the breathing, but what of the spirit? What is its true nature? Does it sit in the body like water in a glass, or like an accident in a substance? Is it self-subsistent? If it is a self-subsistent substance, then does it occupy space or not? If so, where is it located—in the heart, the brain, or somewhere else? If not, how can a substance not occupy space?

Answer: This is a question about the secret of the spirit, which the Messenger of God ﷺ was not permitted to divulge to anyone not qualified for it. If you are qualified for it, take heed and know that the spirit is not a body residing in another body like water

ⁱ *Fayḍ* can mean "overflowing, effusion, pouring, emanation, expenditure", etc.

in a glass, nor is it an accident residing in the heart or the brain like blackness in a black object or knowledge in a knower. It is a substance, not an accident, for it recognizes itself as well as its Creator and can apprehend intelligible things. All of these are objects of knowledge, and all objects of knowledge are accidents. If the spirit were an accident subsisting upon knowledge, this would mean that one accident subsisted another, which is inconceivable. Furthermore, a single accident can only signify one thing with respect to its locus, but the spirit can signify two different things simultaneously: for example, when it knows its Creator, it knows itself. All this shows that the spirit is not an accident, for an accident cannot have these attributes,

Nor is the spirit a body, for a body can be divided but the spirit cannot. If it could be divided, this would mean that one part of it could know something while another part of it was ignorant of the very same thing, such that at one and the same time it would both know and not know that thing. This is impossible in much the same way as it is impossible for a single object to be both black and white at the same time. This indicates that the spirit is a single entity, and all the wise agree that it is an "indivisible part"—if one could even call it a "part," since a part implies a whole, and there is no whole to speak of here, except in the sense that one is "part" of ten inasmuch as if you were to gather all the constituents that make the number ten what it is, the number one would be among them. Likewise, if you enumerated all the beings in existence, or all the things that constitute man, the spirit would be among them.

Once you understand that the spirit is indivisible, the next question is whether or not it occupies space. Now it cannot occupy space, since anything that does can be divided, and an indivisible part cannot be divided, as can be proven mathematically as well as rationally. The simplest proof is the consideration that if one imagines a substance between two other substances, the two on

the sides must each be touching a different part of the one in the middle, such that the part the left one touches could be ignorance, and the part the right one touches could be knowledge, thus rendering it knowledgeable and ignorant of the same thing. Or suppose there were a flat wall before us composed of indivisible parts: the side we could see would have to be something different from the other side we could not see, for an object cannot be visible and invisible at the same time. And when the sun shone upon one side, only that side would light up, and not the other.

If it is established, then, that the spirit is indivisible, it must also be self-subsistent and not restricted in any way.



Question: What is the true nature of this reality—the spirit—and what are the attributes of this substance, and how exactly is it attached to the body? Is it inside or outside it, attached to it or detached from it?

Answer: It is neither inside nor outside, neither detached nor attached. Such attributes apply only to bodies that occupy space, and we have established that the spirit is not one of those. Therefore it is free from either of these opposites, much as an inanimate object is neither knowing nor ignorant, for only a living being can be those.

Question: Is it qualified by direction?

Answer: The spirit transcends spatiality, corporeal attachment, and direction; these are attributes of physical bodies and their accidents, and the spirit is neither a body nor an accident in a body, but is a holy being far beyond all these.

Question: Why was the Messenger ﷺ forbidden to divulge this secret and the true nature of the spirit by the Words of God Most High, Say, *'The Spirit is from the command of my Lord'* (Qur'ān 17:85)?

Answer: Because minds cannot comprehend it. There are two kinds of people: the masses and the elite. The ordinary man would scarcely be able to accept that God Himself could have such attributes, never mind the human spirit. This is why the Karrāmīs, Hanbalīs, and others with mediocre minds denied God's transcendence and affirmed that He has a body, for they could not conceive of how anything could exist without one. Those who are able to rise a little above the mediocre mind can understand that God does not have a body, but still may be unable to deny that He is subject to the accidents that are associated with corporeality, and so they attribute a direction to Him. The Ash'arīs and Mu'tazilīs were able to rise above that mediocre mentality and to understand that He exists beyond direction.

Question: Why it is not permitted to divulge this secret to such people?

Answer: They would find it inconceivable for anyone but God to possess such attributes. If you told them otherwise, some of them would call you an unbeliever and accuse you of describing yourself as only God should be described, as if you were claiming to be a god yourself.

Question: Why do they hold that these attributes are impossible not only for beings other than God Most High, but for Him as well?

Answer: Because they think that just as it is impossible for two things to be in the same place at the same time, it must also be impossible for two things to exist in no place at all. It is impossible for two things to be in the same place at the same time, since if they did there would be nothing to differentiate them. Likewise, if two things were in no place at all at the same time, how could they be differentiated and told apart? This is why they also say that two instances of blackness cannot occupy the same space at the same time, and that in this sense even identical things can be opposites.

Question: This seems a powerful argument. How can it be refuted?

Answer: They are incorrect to assume that the only way to differentiate objects from one another is by reference to location. In fact there are three ways: the first is by location, such as in the case of two bodies in two different places; the second is by time, such as two instances of blackness in the same substance at different times; and the third is by definition and nature, such as when several accidents all share the same locus. An object may have a certain color, taste, temperature, and moisture all at the same time in the same place, but these accidents all have differing essential natures and definitions. Color differs from taste in its essential nature, not in space or time; knowledge, power, and will are different in their essential natures, though in a certain sense they are all the same thing. If there can be accidents with different natures, it is not hard to see how there can be things with differing essential natures that exist outside of space.

Question: Aside from the issue of differentiation, is there not a more obvious objection to your position: that it amounts to likening God to creation, and claiming the most unique of God Almighty's Attributes for the spirit?

Answer: By no means! We also say that man is alive, knowing, powerful, willing, hearing, seeing, and speaking, all of which are true of God; yet that is not to liken God to His creation, since those attributes are not exclusive to God. Likewise, it is not only God that is beyond the confines of space and direction. God's unique Attribute is that He is self-subsistent while all else subsists through Him, and that He exists through His own Essence and not through anything else. All other things are nonexistent in themselves and must borrow their existence from Him, while God's existence is His own, borrowed from no other. Self-subsistence belongs to God alone, Exalted is He.



Question: You have spoken of the meaning of shaping, breathing, and the spirit, but you have not said anything about the meaning of the attribution of the spirit to God Almighty, and why He said *of My Spirit* and attributed the spirit to Himself. If it is simply because the spirit exists through God, that is true of all things; yet He said, *I shall create a human from clay*, not "My clay," but then said, *So when I have shaped him and breathed into him of My Spirit...* (Qur'ān 38:71-72). If it means that the spirit is a piece that emanated from God Most High into the heart of man like a coin falling into the hand of a beggar, of which could say, "I gave him some of my money," this would imply a division of the Essence of God, which you have said is impossible. You also said that His emanation is not a matter of a piece becoming detached from Him.

Answer: It is as though the sun, if it were capable of speaking, were to say, "I have emanated some of my light upon the earth." That would be true, and would mean that the light that reached the earth was of the same kind as the light of the sun in a certain aspect, though it is much weaker than it. You know that the spirit transcends direction and space, and that it has the potential to know and discover all things, which is a certain kind of correspondence to the divine. This is why He called it *My Spirit*; and this correspondence has nothing to do with corporeality.

Question: What is the meaning of the Almighty's Words, *Say, 'The Spirit is from the command of my Lord'* (Qur'ān 17:85)? What are the Realm of Command and the Realm of Creation?

Answer: Everything that is subject to dimension and measure pertains to the sphere of bodies and accidents. This is the Realm of Creation (*'ālam al-khalq*), which here has the sense of "measuring-out" (*taqdīr*) rather than the sense of engendering and making, for that is one meanings of the word *khalq* in Arabic. Anything

that has no quantity or measure can be called a divine Command; this is the correspondence of which we just spoke. Anything of this kind, such as the spirits of human beings and angels, is said to belong to the Realm of Command (*‘ālam al-amr*), which is an expression denoting those things that fall within the scope of sensation, imagination, direction, space, and the confines of dimension, measure, and quantity.

Question: Do you actually imagine that the spirit is uncreated, and consequently that it is eternal?

Answer: Some have said as much, but they were wrong. What we say is that the spirit is uncreated in the sense that it is not subject to measure by quantity or size, nor to division or spatial confinement; yet we also say that it is created inasmuch as it is contingent, not eternal. The rational proof of its contingent nature is lengthy and is built on many premises; but what matters is that the human spirit appears when the sperm-drop is ready to receive it, just as an image appears in the mirror when it is polished although the image existed before the polishing. To elaborate, if spirits had existed before bodies, there would have to have been many of them, or just one; but since neither is possible, they cannot have existed then. The reason why spirits cannot be unified after their attachment to bodies is that it is patently true that one man may know something that another man does not know. If the cognitive substance in the two men were one and the same, this would be impossible, just as it is impossible for one man to know something and not know it simultaneously. By "the cognitive substance" we mean the spirit. Nor can it be multiple, for a unit cannot be divided or multiplied unless it is measurable like a body, which can be divided because it is measurable, and can be disassembled because it is composed of parts. If a thing has neither parts nor measure, how could it be divided?

As for the question of spirits having been multiple before they became attached to the bodies, it is impossible because these spirits would have to have been either identical or different, neither of which is possible. They could not have been identical, simply because no two things can be identical; this is why two instances of blackness cannot occupy the same locus, nor two bodies the same space. Duality implies distinction, while identicalness implies the absence of distinction. Two instances of blackness can occupy two different loci, because then one would differ from the other with respect to location. Likewise, the same location can exist in two different times, since each is differentiated from the other by virtue of the chronological difference. No two things exist that are completely identical; they can only be relatively so. We may say that Zayd and 'Amr' are alike both bodily and in being human, or that black ink and a crow are alike in being black.

The reason why it is impossible for there to have been multiple differing spirits is that there are two kinds of differentiation. The first is differentiation of kind and quiddity, such as the difference between water and fire, or black and white; the second is differentiation of accidents that do not impact on quiddity, such as the difference between hot and cold water. It is impossible that individual human spirits could have differed in kind and quiddity, as all human spirits share the same nature and are of a kind. It is also impossible that they could have differed in terms of accidents, since things that are of a kind can only differ in this manner if they are assigned and attached to bodies in some way; there must be some differentiation in the parts of the body, even if only in their proximity to heaven, or something of that nature. Until the spirits were assigned and attached to their bodies, they could not have

i In Arabic these are used as standard names, like A and B or X and Y in English, in hypothetical situations.

been differentiated. Some people might require further elaboration in order to be thoroughly convinced, but we have said enough here to make the point.

Question: If all that is true, what will the situation of the spirits be when they part with the bodies and are no longer attached to them? How can they then be multiple and distinct from one another?

Answer: That is different, because once they have been attached to their bodies they will have acquired qualities such as knowledge and ignorance, purity and impurity, good and bad character; and these qualities mean that they will remain differentiated even after they part with their bodies, which makes their differentiated multiplicity possible in a way that it could not have been before they had ever been attached to their bodies to begin with.



Question: What is the meaning of the Prophet's ﷺ words, "God Most High created Adam in His own image" (Muslim 2612), or "in the image of the All-Merciful"¹ as one narration has it?

Answer: The term *ṣūra* (image or form) has several meanings. It can be used to denote a composition of shapes placed together in a particular arrangement, which is the sensory meaning of the term. It can also mean a composition of suprasensory meanings, which can also be placed together to form an arrangement in the same way. One may speak of the form of an academic issue, an event, or a calculation, or speak of a "mental image." The meaning of Adam being shaped in God's image is a suprasensory image, which refers to the very same correspondence we described earlier. It all comes back to the Essence, Attributes, and Acts. The true nature of the essence of the spirit is that it is self-subsistent, being neither accident, body, nor delimited substance; that it has no locus in space

or direction; and that it is neither connected to nor separate from the body or the world, and is neither inside nor outside them. All of these things are also true of God, Exalted is He.

As far as the Attributes are concerned, man was created living, knowing, powerful, willing, hearing, seeing, and speaking; and God is all of these. With regard to the Acts too, the human being's action begins with will, whose effect manifests first in the heart and is then communicated through the animate spirit, which is a subtle vapor in the heart, upwards to the brain and then from there through the nerves to the ligaments and muscles, which set the limbs in motion. For example, this impulse may direct the fingers to move, grip a pen, and write upon the paper whatever words were first formed in the imagination, since without the imagination there would be nothing to write. Anyone who reflects on how God's Acts come into manifestation—how He creates flora and fauna upon the earth by means of the motion of the heavens and celestial bodies, and how the angels obediently move the heavens at His command—will see that the way in which a human being acts in his own world, the microcosm of his body, is just like the way in which the Creator acts in the macrocosm of the world. He will realize that in this regard his heart corresponds to the Throne, his brain to the Footstool, his senses to the angels who obey God and cannot disobey Him, and his nerves and muscles to the heavens. The power that he wields over his fingers is like the force of nature that holds sway over bodies. The paper, pen, and ink are like the chemical elements that constitute the building blocks of all compounds with regard to the propensity for bonding, compounding, and repelling. The mirror of the imagination is like the Preserved Tablet. Anyone who discovers the truth of these comparisons will realize the true meaning of the Prophet's saying, peace be upon him, "God Most High created Adam in His own image." But understanding the disposition of God's Acts is a recondite subject

requiring a strong foundation in many other sciences. What we have said here is but a brief allusion to some of them.

Question: What, then, did the Prophet ﷺ mean when he said, "He who knows himself knows his Lord"?ⁱ

Answer: This is because things can only be known by likeness and by analogy. Were it not for the correspondence we have described, it would be impossible for man to ascend beyond self-knowledge to knowledge of the Creator. If God Almighty had not gathered within man all that is in the world, making him a microcosmic facsimile of the universe as though he were a commanding lord within his own world, he would not have been able to know the cosmos and the divine Authority, Lordship, Intellect, Power, Knowledge, and all the other divine Attributes. It is through the soul's correspondences and parallels to the divine that it is able to ascend to knowledge of its Creator. When true and perfect knowledge of this correspondence is attained, all of this becomes clear.



Question: If spirits come into being contemporaneously with bodies, then what is the meaning of the sayings of the Prophet, peace be upon him, "God created the spirits two thousand years before the bodies;"² "I was the first Prophet to be created and the last to be sent;"³ and, "I was a Prophet when Adam was between water and clay"?⁴

Answer: These hadiths do not prove that the spirit is eternal; on the contrary, they prove that it is contingent and created. It is true that on the surface they do seem to imply that spirits existed

i This saying is very well-known in the Sufi tradition and is often cited as a hadith, but it has no known basis in the corpus of authentic hadiths.

before bodies. Yet surface appearances present no difficulty, for it is possible to interpret them; and the deepest truths lie not on the surface but in their interpretation, just as is true of texts that on the surface seem to liken God Almighty to creation.

As for what the Prophet ﷺ said regarding God creating the spirits before the bodies, it may be that by "spirits" he meant the angels, and by "bodies" he meant the bodies of the world: the Throne, the Footstool, the celestial bodies, air, earth, and water. Consider how tiny the human body is compared to the earth, and the earth to the sun, the sun to the galaxy, the galaxy to the entire heavens, and the heavens to the Footstool—for *His Footstool extends over the heavens and the earth* (Qur'ān 2:255); and the Footstool itself is tiny compared to the Throne. When you reflect on all of this you will grasp how minute the bodies of human beings are—and that it is hardly appropriate to understand a mention of "bodies" without further qualification as a reference to human bodies in particular.

Likewise, you must realize that in reality the spirits of human beings are as tiny compared to those of the angels as their bodies are compared to those of worldly beings. If you had intimate knowledge of spirits, you would recognize that the human spirit compared to the angelic spirit is like the flame of a candle compared to an enormous fire that could cover the world. The spirits of the angels have a hierarchy, each spirit having its own unique level so that no single level has more than one occupant. That is not the case for human spirits, which all share the same kind and level despite their multitudes. Every individual angel is a kind in his own right, and one of a kind too. The Almighty alludes to this when He says, quoting the angels: *There is not one of us but has a known station; and truly it is we who are the ranged ones* (Qur'ān 37:164–165). The Prophet ﷺ also alluded to it when he said that an angel who bows does not prostrate, and one who stands does not bow, for each of them has a known station. Therefore, if "the

spirits" and "the bodies" are spoken of without further qualification, one could only take them to mean the spirits of the angels and the bodies of the world.

As for his saying ﷺ, "I was the first of the Prophets to be created and the last to be sent," the meaning of "creation" here is destiny, not existention. Before his mother bore him he was not a created being, but all eventualities are ordained in destiny before they come to fruition in existence. It is therefore like the proverb, "The first thought is the last action." When an architect begins planning a house, the first thing he imagines is the finished building, which will not actually exist until the work is completed. The finished house is therefore the first thing to be planned, but the last thing to come into existence. Everything that precedes it—the bricklaying, the construction of the walls, and so on—is a means to the final end, which is the house. Now that you are aware of this, know that the purpose of the primordial creation (*fiṭra*) of humankind was for them to experience the eternal happiness of proximity to the divine Presence, which could only be achieved through the teachings of the Prophets. Prophethood therefore had to come into being, but its true purpose was its final completion, not its beginnings; and the Ways of God Most High decreed that it be completed gradually, just as a house is built gradually. The foundation of Prophethood was therefore laid down with Adam ﷺ, and it continued to develop and grow until it reached perfection with Muḥammad ﷺ. The objective was always that Prophethood be perfected and completed, and its first foundations were a means to that end, like the foundations laid for the building and the bases made for its walls, which are means for the completion of the house. This is why he is the Seal of Prophets, for adding to perfection only spoils it. The perfect form of the hand is a palm with five fingers. Just as a four-fingered hand is imperfect, so too is one with six fingers, for the sixth is superfluous and is therefore in

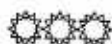
reality a diminution, not the addition that it superficially appears to be. The Prophet ﷺ alluded to this when he said, "Prophethood is like a house that is almost completely built except for one brick; and I am that one brick" (Bukhārī 3535), or words to that effect. You can see, then, that his being the Seal of Prophets is absolutely necessary, for it signifies the culmination and perfection of Prophethood; and the culmination is the first thing to be destined, but the last to come into existence.

As for his saying ﷺ, "I was a Prophet when Adam was between water and clay," it alludes to the very same thing: he was destined to be a Prophet even before the creation of Adam ﷺ had been completed, for God only created Adam in order to select the best of his progeny, and to do so gradually until the purification was completed. This has been called the holy Muḥammadan Prophetic spirit. The only way to understand it is to think of how a house, for instance, has two kinds of existence: its existence in the mind and brain of the architect, who can visualize it as though he were looking at it; and its existence outside the mind in the physical world. Its conceptual existence is the cause of its actual external existence, and must therefore precede it. In the same way, know that God Most High first destines a thing and secondly brings it into being in accordance with that destiny. The destiny is recorded upon the Preserved Tablet just as an architect might draw his plan on a board or on paper. By this means, the house comes into a certain mode of existence in its complete form, which is then the cause of its real existence. This form is drawn on the architect's page by means of a pen, which acts in accordance with knowledge—or rather is propelled by it. In the same way, the forms of divine concerns are first inscribed on the Preserved Tablet by the Pen, which moves in accordance with the divine Knowledge. The Tablet is the term for the entity that is receptive to the inscription of the form; and the Pen is the term for the entity from which the

forms emanate upon the engraved Tablet. It is the tip of the Pen that engraves the forms, and the Tablet receives them. Now, a tablet and pen are not necessarily physical objects made of wood or reed; they need not be physical objects at all, for their essential identities are rooted in their functions, and any physical form they may take is only incidental to that. Indeed it is no surprise that the Pen and Tablet of God, Exalted is He, should be incorporeal just as His Fingers and Hand are, in a manner befitting His Essence and divinity; for He transcends corporeality. Such things are all sublime spiritual substances, some transmitting knowledge like the Pen, others receiving it like the Tablet; for God Most High *taught by the pen* (Qur'ān 96:4).

Once you understand these two modes of existence, [you will see how] he was a Prophet before Adam ﷺ in respect of primary destined existence, not of secondary, tangible and material, existence.

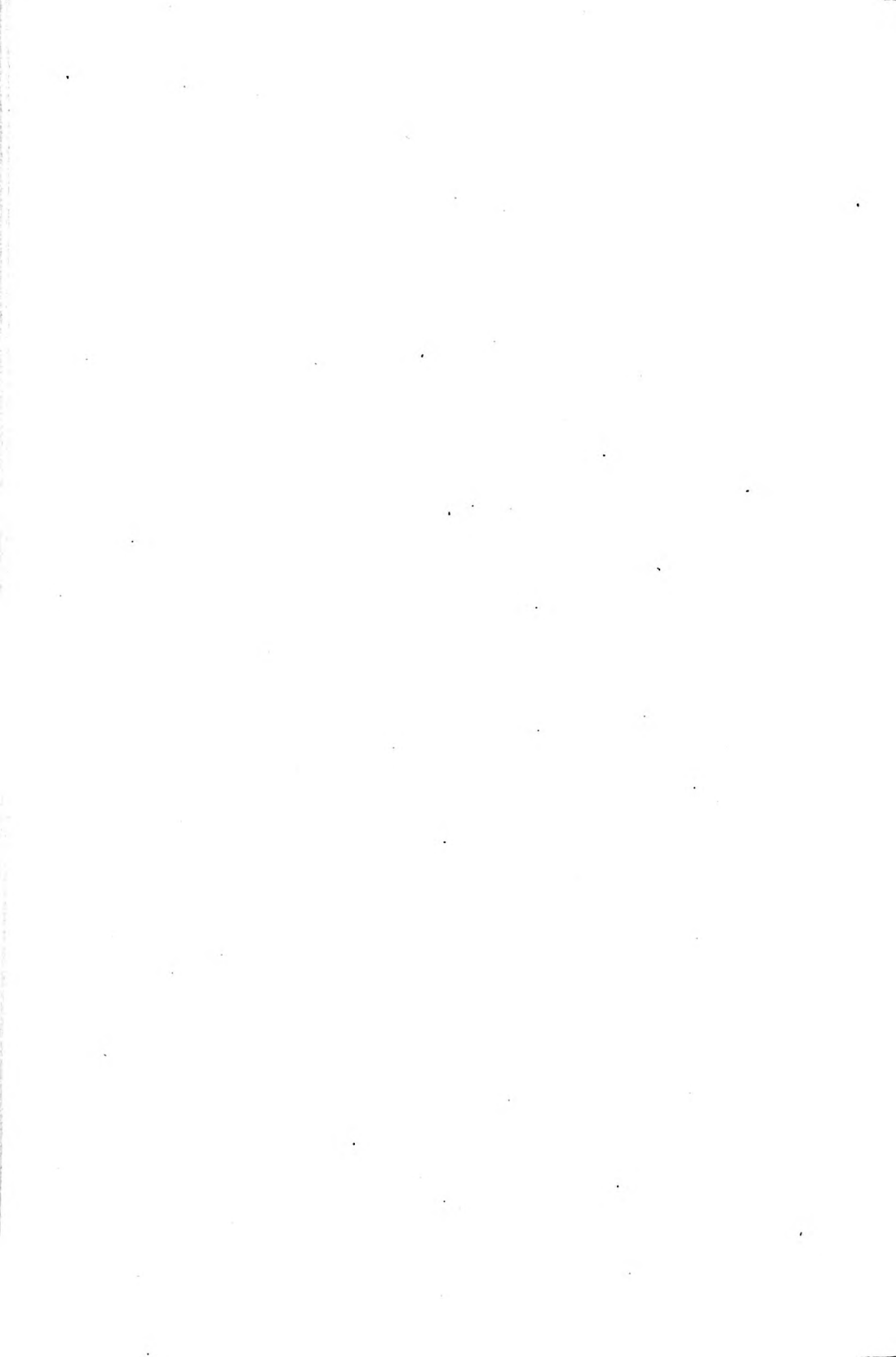
All Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds; and may blessings and peace be upon the Master of Messengers and his Family and Companions, one and all. Amen.





THE SUMPTUOUS PEARL,
ON THE SCIENCES OF ESCHATOLOGY

al-Durra al-fākhira fī kashf 'ulūm al-ākhirā





*In the Name of God,
the All-Merciful, the Most Merciful*

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

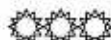
Praise be to God, Who has reserved immortality for Himself and decreed mortality for all others, making death the fate of all mankind, Muslims and unbelievers alike, and Who has established the categories of judgment by His knowledge, decreed that the Hereafter follow the days of this life, and destined a blessed Afterlife for whomever of His creatures He willed. May God bless our master Muḥammad, the Messenger of the All-Knowing King, and his Family and Companions whom He chose for great grace and favor in the Abode of Peace.

To proceed: God Most High affirms three times in His Glorious Book, *Every soul shall taste death* (Qur'ān 3:185, 21:35, 29:57). By this He alludes to three deaths in the [three] worlds: those confined to the lower world (*dunyā*) shall die, those confined to the Spiritual Realm (*malakūt*) shall die, and those confined to the Realm of Divine Dominion (*jabarūt*) shall die. The first are Adam and his progeny and all the three classes of living being.ⁱ The Spiritual Realm is the realm of the various kinds of angels and jinn.

i This likely means land animals, aquatic animals, and birds.

The Realm of Divine Dominion is the realm of the chosen from among the angels. God Most High says, *God chooses Messengers from the angels and from mankind* (Qur'ān 22:75). This means the cherubim, the Throne-bearers, the inhabitants of the Pavilions of Majesty whom God describes with approval in His Book when He says, *Those who are with Him do not disdain to worship Him, nor do they weary. They glorify night and day, never faltering* (Qur'ān 21:19–20). They are the inhabitants of the Enclosure of Holiness [*ḥazīrat al-quds*],ⁱ those referred to in God's Words, *Had We desired to find some diversion, We could have found it in Our Presence—if We ever did* (Qur'ān 21:17). Yet even they will die, despite their position of nearness to God, since not even such proximity can protect them from death.

I shall first speak to you of death in the lower world. Prepare yourself to take in what I say as I describe it for you as a transition from one state to another, if you believe in the reality of God, His Messenger, and the Last Day; for I bring you the manifest truth. God has attested to what I say, and the Qur'ān confirms it, as do authentic reports from the Messenger of God ﷺ.



i Ghazālī says in *Mishkāt al-anwār*: "No one may draw near to God without standing in the midst of the Enclosure of Holiness. The realm that is elevated beyond the reach of sense-perception and imagination is what we mean by the World of Holiness. When we consider it in its entirety, such that nothing may leave it and nothing foreign to it may enter it, we call it the Enclosure of Holiness. We might also call the human spirit, which is the channel of the glimmers of Holiness, the Holy Valley. This Enclosure comprises lesser pastures, some of which are more fully imbued with the meanings of Holiness than others, but the word "enclosure" embraces all of its gradations."



CHAPTER I

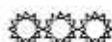
THE PRIMORDIAL LIFE

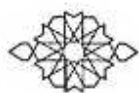
When God laid His hand upon the back of Adam ﷺ and took the two handfuls from it,ⁱ He collected the first handful from his right side, the second from his left. The Almighty then spread out His Hands, and Adam looked upon His noble Palms and saw them there, arrayed like motes of dust. Then He said, "These are for Paradise, and I care not! They shall do the deeds of the Paradise-bound. And these are for Hell, and I care not! They shall do the deeds of the Hell-bound." Adam ﷺ said, "Lord, what are the deeds of the Hell-bound?" He replied, "Associating partners with Me, belying My Messengers, and disobeying the commandments and prohibitions in My Book." Adam ﷺ said, "Call them to testify against themselves; perhaps they will not do so." And so *He made them testify against themselves, 'Am I not your Lord?' They said, 'Yes indeed; we testify!'* (Qur'ān 7:172), and He called the angels and Adam to testify regarding them that they had acknowledged

i "God created Adam and then laid His right hand upon his back and drew some progeny out of him, and said, 'I created these people for Paradise, and they shall do the deeds of the inhabitants of Paradise.' Then he laid His hand upon his back and drew some progeny out of him, and said, 'I created these people for Hell-Fire...'" Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan* 4703.

His lordship. Then He returned them to their places. They were living souls without bodies then, but when He returned them to Adam's loins He caused them to die and seized their spirits to keep with Him in one of the treasures of the Throne.

When a sperm-drop comes to rest, it settles in the womb until its form is completed. The soul in it is dead, but its spiritual essence keeps the body from decomposing. Then when God Most High breathes the spirit into it, He returns to it the secret that He had seized from it and kept safe in the treasury of the Throne, and the infant is quickened with life. Many an infant stirs within its mother's womb when this quickening takes place, whether she feels it or not. These, then, are the first death and the second life.





CHAPTER 2

THE ASCENT OF THE RIGHTEOUS SOUL

God, Almighty and Majestic is He, then places the human being in the lower world for the days of his life, until his appointed time comes and the provision that was destined for him is finally exhausted. As death approaches—the death of the lower world—four angels descend to him: one angel pulls the soul from his right foot, another from his left foot, another from his right hand, and another from his left hand. Sometimes the spiritual world may be revealed to the dying person before he enters the final throes, so that he sees those angels—not as they actually appear in their own world, but in a manner that his mind can withstand. If he still has the ability to speak, he may tell of what he sees. Or he may over-think what he sees and mistake it for some Satanic ruse, and so remain silent and tongue-tied even as they wrest his soul from his body's extremities, from his very fingertips. The soul of such a man comes out easily like water from a jug, while the spiritⁱ of a wicked man must be wrenched out like a skewer from wet wool, as

i The author uses *nafs* (soul) and *rūb* (spirit) interchangeably in this passage, suggesting that he is using the terms in their more general colloquial sense, rather than observing the technical distinction between the two that he employs elsewhere in his writings.

the Lawgiver ﷺ described it.¹ The dying person feels as if his belly is full of thorns, as though his soul is passing through the eye of a needle, as though the heavens have come crashing down to earth with him in between them. Thus when Ka'b' ﷺ was asked about death, he replied, "It is as if a thorny branch were plunged into a man's belly, and then a strong man pulled it out, breaking off what he could and leaving the rest." The Prophet ﷺ said, "A single pang of death is worse than three hundred blows with a sword."

As the dying man experiences all this, his brow becomes soaked with sweat, his eyes glaze over, his chest heaves, his breaths become gasps, and his complexion becomes pale. When 'Ā'isha ﷺⁱⁱ witnessed the Messenger of God ﷺ in this state as he lay with his head in her lap, she recited this poem as tears streamed from her eyes:

I would give my own life to ransom you
 From the torment and pain that you now feel!
 The jinn have never touched you before this,
 Nor were you someone who had known terror.
 How is it that now, as I look at your face,
 I see it like yellow dye, soaking wet?
 Though the color of one who's died is sallow,
 Brilliant lights are shining upon your face!

At the moment of death, the tribulations of the soul cause the face to change because of the terrible agony it experiences. When the soul is confined to the heart, the tongue is stilled and can no longer speak. There are two reasons why no one can speak when

i Ka'b al-Aḥbār (d. 35/656), a learned Jewish convert to Islam of the second generation of Muslims (the Followers), who was an important source of Abrahamic lore.

ii The wife of the Prophet ﷺ, and one of the leading religious authorities among the Companions.

his soul is collected in his breast. The first is that it is simply too difficult to do so, for the chest presses tightly upon the soul confined in it. Consider how when a person is struck in the chest, he is stunned and rendered unable to speak. Anyone will cry out if he is stabbed, except someone who is stabbed in the chest, who will simply fall down dead without a sound. The second reason is that the voice is propelled by natural heat, and when this heat is stilled and extinguished it is no longer possible to breathe except by the diminished impulse of the brain. The breath therefore changes in two ways: in depth and in temperature, for it loses its heat.

At this juncture, the conditions of the dying differ. For some, this is when the angel pierces them with a spear poisoned with fire, causing the soul to flee and leave the body, whereupon the angel grabs it as it quivers like quicksilver; it is the size of a bee, but shaped like a human. Then the guards of Hell (*Zabāniya*)ⁱ take it. For others, the soul is drawn out little by little until it is confined to the throat, wherein it remains as a narrow channel connecting to the heart. Then the angel pierces it with that aforementioned spear; the soul does not separate from the heart until it has been pierced. The secret [quality] of that spear is that it has been dipped in the sea of death, and so when it is placed upon the heart its secret spreads through the body like flowing poison. For the secret of life is lodged in the heart, where its influence has been exercised from the moment of the first creation. Some theologians say that life is not synonymous with the soul but means the merging of soul and body.

When the soul has made this upward movement, temptations begin to be presented to it. Satan may send his minions to the dying person, instructing them to appear to him in the guise of

i *So let him summon his cohorts—We shall summon the Zabāniya!* (Qur'ān 96:17-18).

deceased loved ones who were always true to him in life, such as his parents, siblings, or dear friends. They may say to him, "You are dying, as we died before you. You must die as a Jew, for that is the religion that God Most High accepts." If he refuses them, they leave him and others come telling him, "Die as a Christian, for that is the religion of Christ, which abrogated the religion of Moses." In such a manner they will describe to him the doctrines of each religion. This is the point where God causes some to deviate in accordance with His will, which is the meaning behind His Words: *Our Lord, cause not our hearts to deviate after You have guided us, but grant us mercy from Your Presence. Truly You are the Ever-Giving!* (Qur'ān 3:8); that is to say, "Do not cause our hearts to deviate at the moment of death, after having guided us to our faith before."

But if God desires that His servant be guided and strengthened, He sends mercy to him. It is said that this means Gabriel عليه السلام himself, and that he banishes Satan and wipes the grimace from the dying man's face so that he may smile or even laugh. Many are seen smiling in this moment, rejoicing in the harbinger of good news who has visited them as a mercy from God Most High, saying, "Do you recognize me? I am Gabriel, and those demons are your enemies. Die following the unswerving primal religion (*hanifiyya*) and the Muḥammadan way!" There is nothing sweeter or more joyous that a dying man can experience than this, and it is what is meant by God's Words, *grant us mercy from Your Presence. Truly You are the Ever-Giving!* Such a person dies in the state of primordial disposition (*fiṭra*).

Others are pierced by the spear of death as they stand in prayer, lie asleep, engage in his work, or sit idly. This is sudden death, when the soul is seized all at once. For others, when the soul reaches the throat they see their deceased family and neighbors, and they let out a lowing sound that is audible to all creatures except humans;

any human who heard it would fall unconscious. The last sense the dying person loses is his hearing, for when the spirit departs the heart altogether, the eyesight is destroyed, while hearing persists until the soul is finally seized. This is why the Prophet ﷺ said, "Prompt your dying to testify that there is no god but God" (Muslim 916), although he stressed that this should not be overdone lest it contribute to the great terror and apprehension that the dying are already suffering.

When you look at a dying person and see him drooling with contracted lips, a blackened face, and bluish eyes, this is a sign that he is damned and that his damnation was shown to him in his final moments. If his mouth is dry as though he were smiling, his face is bright, and his eyes are lowered, this is a sign that he was shown the blissful and noble station awaiting him in the Hereafter. When the angel seizes the fortunate soul, two angels with beautiful faces, handsome clothing, and fragrant scents take it and wrap it in silk from Paradise. It is the size of a bee, but human in shape and still possessed of its mind and all the knowledge it acquired in life. They bear it up through the air, carrying it past the generations and nations of old, as numerous as a great swarm of locusts, some known to them and others not. When they reach the lowest heaven, the angel entrusted with the soul knocks upon the door. When asked who he is, he replies, "I am *Ṣaṣā'il*.ⁱ Here with me is So-and-so," naming the deceased by the best and favorite of his names to him. They say, "What a fine man he was! His creed was sound and untainted by doubt."

Then he is taken to the second heaven, where the angel knocks upon the door, and gives the same reply when asked to identify himself. They say, "Welcome to So-and-so, who was diligent in

ⁱ The name *Ṣaṣā'il* is sometimes identified with the angel of horses, although this does not seem to be the case here.

observing his obligatory prayers!" Then he is taken to the third heaven, where the angel knocks upon the door, and gives the same reply when asked to identify himself. They say, "Welcome to So-and-so! He was always careful to honor God's right to his wealth, and never withheld any of it." Then he is taken to the fourth heaven, where the angel repeats his introduction, to which they reply, "Welcome to So-and-so! He used to keep his fasts well, and refrained from lewdness and forbidden foods." Then he is taken to the fifth heaven, where the angel repeats his introduction, to which they reply, "Welcome to So-and-so! He performed the pilgrimage that God Most High obliged him to, and did so without ostentation or showing off."

Then he is taken to the sixth heaven, where the angel repeats his introduction, to which they reply, "Welcome to the righteous man, the goodly soul! He was ever dutiful to his parents." The door is opened to him, and he passes through until he comes to the seventh heaven, where the angel repeats his introduction, to which they reply, "Welcome to So-and-so! He was always praying for forgiveness in the hours before dawn, and giving charity in secret, and looking after orphans." The door is opened to him, and he passes on until he comes to the Pavilions of Majesty, where the angel repeats his introduction, to which they reply, "Welcome to the righteous servant, the goodly soul! He was much given to praying for forgiveness and enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and he was kind to the poor." He will pass through throngs of angels, each one giving him good news and shaking his hand, until he comes to the Lote Tree of the Far Boundary, where the angel repeats his introduction, to which they reply, "Welcome, welcome to So-and-so! His deeds were righteous and dedicated to God Most High alone." Then the door will be opened, and he passes through a sea of fire, then a sea of light, then a sea of darkness, then a sea of water, then a sea of ice, then a sea of hail,

each sea being a thousand-year passage. Then he passes through the veils that hang before the Throne of the All-Merciful, which number eighty thousand pavilions, each pavilion having eighty thousand balconies; and upon each balcony is a moon singing of the oneness, transcendence, and holiness of God. If but one of these moons emerged in the sky above this world, it would be worshipped instead of God Most High, and its light would singe the earth.

Then a herald calls from the Holy Presence behind those pavilions: "Who is this soul whom you have brought here?" His name is given, and the Majestic Glorious Lord says, "Bring him forward. What a fine servant you were to Me!" When he stands before Him, He shames him with rebuke and reproach until he supposes that he is doomed; but then He pardons him.ⁱ Such was related from Qāḍi Yahyā ibn Aktham,ⁱⁱ who was seen in a dream after he died and asked, "What did God do with you?" He replied, "He stood me before Him and said to me, 'Evil old man! Did you not do this, and that?' I replied, 'Lord, this is not what I was told about You!' He said, 'And what were you told about Me, Yahyā?' I replied, 'My God, my Master, Ma'mar told me on the authority of al-Zuhri, on the authority of 'Urwa, on the authority of 'Ā'isha ؓ, on the authority of the Prophet ﷺ, on the authority of Gabriel ؑ, that You Yourself said, "I would be ashamed to punish any person who lived and grew old as a Muslim."' He smiled and said, 'Yahyā, you have spoken the truth, and so did Ma'mar, and so did al-Zuhri, and so did 'Urwa, and so did 'Ā'isha ؓ, and so did Muḥammad, and so did Gabriel, and so did I! I have forgiven you.'"

i This is reminiscent of the scene in Ghazālī's *Risālat al-Tayr* (Epistle of the Birds) when the King of the Birds first chides them for daring to approach him, then welcomes and honors them, thereby manifesting first Majesty and then Beauty.

ii The chief justice of the Abbasid court under al-Ma'mūn (d. 242/857).

Ibn Nubātaⁱ was also seen in a dream after his death, and was asked the same question. He replied, "He stood me in His noble Presence and said, 'Are you the one who used to give pretty speeches, inspiring people to commend your eloquence?' I replied, 'Glory be to You! I did so in honor of You.' He said, 'Then give Me a speech like those you gave in the world.' I said, 'He Who created them has crased them; He Who gave them voice has silenced them; He Who made them has unmade them. He will make them once more even as He unmade them; He will renew them even as He created them; He will gather them even as He separated them.' He said to me, "You have spoken the truth. Go, for I have forgiven you."

A similar account is told of Maṣṣūr ibn 'Ammār,ⁱⁱ who was seen in a dream and replied: "He stood me in His noble Presence and asked me, 'What have you brought Me, Maṣṣūr?' I replied, 'Thirty-six pilgrimages.' He said, 'I accept none of them. What else do you bring Me?' I replied, 'Three hundred and sixty full recitations of the Qur'ān, which I recited for You alone.' He said, 'I accept none of them. What else have you brought Me?' I replied, 'I have brought you Your mercy.' He said, 'Now you have brought Me something! Go, for I have forgiven you.'"

There are many such accounts; I have presented a few of them here for anyone ready to be guided by them. All help is to be sought from God alone.

There are some who, on reaching the Footstool, hear the cry, "Send him back!" Others are turned back when they reach the veils. Only those who know God Most High may reach Him; and only those who attain the fourth stationⁱⁱⁱ or a higher one may stand before Him.

i A noted preacher from Asia Minor (d. 374/984).

ii A preacher and narrator from Iraq (d. 225/839).

iii See Chapter 5.



CHAPTER 3

THE DEMISE OF THE WICKED SOUL

As for the wicked person, his soul is wrested away violently, and his face is contorted with bitterness. The angel says, "Get out of that vile body, vile soul!", and it gives a cry that most strongly resembles the braying of a donkey. Once Azraelⁱ seizes the soul, Hell-guardians with dreadful faces, black garb, and noxious odors take it and swaddle it in a hair shirt, where it is transformed into a human shape the size of a locust; for in the Hereafter an unbeliever is physically larger than a believer. An authentic hadith states that the tooth of an unbeliever in Hell will be as huge as Mount Uhud (Muslim 2851).

Then the soul is taken up until it reaches the door of the lowest heaven. The angel entrusted with the soul knocks upon the door. When asked who he is, he replies, "I am Daqyā'il," which is the name of the angel in charge of the guardians of Hell. When asked who is with him, he replies, "So-and-so, son of So-and-so," calling him by the ugliest and most hateful name to him in the world. They say, "No welcome to him! *The gates of Heaven shall not be*

i The Angel of Death.

opened for them, nor shall they enter Paradise until a camel passes through the eye of a needle (Qur'ān 7:40)."

When the angel hears this, he will throw him down from his hand, and the wind will blow him to a distant place. This is the meaning of the Words of God Most High, *One who ascribes partners to God is like one who falls from heaven and is snatched away by birds, or blown by the wind to a far-off place (Qur'ān 22:31)*. What a terrible fate! When he reaches the ground, the Hell-guardians take him to Sijjīn,ⁱ a great rock to which the spirits of the iniquitous are borne.

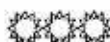
As for the Jews and Christians who followed their religion in life and were washed and buried by their people, they are sent back from the Footstool to their graves. The idolater does not witness any of this, however, for he has been dropped. The hypocrite too is banished in disgrace to his pit.

As for the negligent believers, they are of differing kinds. There are those who are turned back on account of their prayers; one who prayed poorly and carelessly will find his prayer rolled up before him like a robe and flung in his face, and then the prayer will rise up saying, "May God neglect you, even as you neglected me!" Then there are those who are turned back on account of their charity, because they only gave it in order to gain a reputation for charitable works or to win the affections of women, as we have witnessed ourselves—may God preserve us all! Others will be turned back on account of their fasting, for they abstained from food but not from foul and evil speech, and so by the end of the month they had nothing to show for it. Then they are those who are turned back on account of their pilgrimages because they only performed them in order to be known as pilgrims, or financed

i No indeed! The record of the iniquitous is in Sijjīn. And what shall convey to you what is Sijjīn? A sealed book (Qur'ān 83:7-9).

them with ill-gotten gains. Others are turned back because they failed to treat their parents honorably.

There are many other examples of good deeds performed badly, the details of which are known only to those who have devoted themselves to studying the mysteries of sincerity in action and sole devotion to the Beneficent King. Tradition provides ample narrations of such, including the account of Mu'adh ibn Jabal رضي الله عنه concerning the rejection of deeds.ⁱ I need only allude to it briefly here, for many volumes have already been filled with proper treatments of it, and all Muslims recognize the truth of it as well as they recognize their own children.



i This alludes to a long hadith narrated by Mu'adh رضي الله عنه, according to which the angels turn back many from the heavens because their pious works were rendered inadmissible by their insincerity or other faults. See Mundhiri, *al-Tarhib wal-tarhib*, hadith no. 59.



CHAPTER 4

THE INQUISITION IN THE GRAVE

When the soul is returned to the body, it finds that it has already begun to be washed for burial, if there is anyone to wash it; and it sits by the head as it is washed. If God wills, He may uncover the vision of certain righteous people so that they behold the soul sitting there in its earthly appearance. Someone told of how as he was washing his son for burial, he saw his son sitting there by the head of his own corpse. Thinking that he must be imagining things, he went over to the other side, but the figure continued to watch him until the body was completely shrouded. The figure then appeared to him later as the body lay upon the funeral bier. Likewise, it was related by more than one righteous person that he was commanded to call out, as the body lay upon the bier, "Where is So-and-so? Where is the spirit?"—whereupon the shroud heaved at the chest two or three times. Similarly, it is related that the body of Rabi' ibn Khuthaymⁱ trembled in the hand of the person washing him. A certain dead person spoke from his funeral bier during the rule of Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq ؓ, attesting to the virtue of both the latter and 'Umar al-Fārūq ؓ, 'Uthmān ؓ, and 'Alī

ⁱ An early Muslim of the second generation (d. 65/682).

Such occurrences are a matter of the soul bearing witness to something of the spiritual world, which God then allows certain people to hear.

Once the body is wrapped in its shroud, the soul adheres fast to the breast on the outside of it, where it moans and cries, "Bear me with haste to the mercy of my Lord! If only you knew!" If it has been given tidings of damnation, it says, "Slowly, slowly to whatever torment you are taking me! If only you knew!" Whenever a funeral procession passed by the Prophet ﷺ, he would stand up out of respect for it. An authentic hadith states that once when he stood for such a procession, someone said, "Messenger of God, it is a Jew." He replied, "Is it not a soul?" (Bukhārī 1312). The reason he did this is that the mysteries of the spiritual world were revealed to him and so he was at ease with death when it passed him by, since he was one of those who understand it and see it for what it is.

When the body is placed into the grave and the soil is heaped upon it, the grave calls to the deceased, "Once you rejoiced upon my surface; today you sorrow inside my belly. Once you ate all manner of food above; today the worms shall consume you below." Such words of doom it speaks to him as the soil piles up, until the grave is finally filled in. Then an angel named Rūmān calls to him.

Ibn Mas'ūdⁱ related, "I said, 'Messenger of God, what is the first thing the dead person finds when he is laid in his grave?' He replied, 'You are the first person ever to ask me this, Ibn Mas'ūd. The first thing that happens is that an angel named Rūmān comes roaming among the graves and calls to him, "Servant of God! Write your deeds." He replied, "I have no ink or paper." He says, "Come now! Your shroud is your paper, your saliva your ink, and your finger your pen." Then he tears a piece of his shroud for him.

i One of the dearest and most learned Companions of the Prophet ﷺ.

The man begins to write, even if he could not write while in the world, and he recalls all of his good and bad deeds as though they had taken place in a single day. The angel takes that parchment and hangs it around the man's neck.' The Messenger of God ﷺ then recited, *And every man's fate We have fastened to his neck* (Qur'ān 17:13), meaning his deeds."ⁱ

Once this is concluded, he is visited by the Inquisitors of the Grave, two black angels who rend the earth with their fangs, dragging their long hair behind them. Their words are like crashing thunder, their eyes like flashing lightning, and their breath like furious wind. Each of them holds in his hand an iron rod so heavy that all of the jinn and mankind together could not lift it, which could crumble the mightiest mountain to dust with a single blow. When the soul sees them, it is terrified and tries to flee up the corpse's nostrils, causing it to come to life in the breast and return to the state in which it was during the final throes of death, unable to move but able to see and hear.

They then proceed to interrogate and reprove him harshly and severely. The soil around him becomes like water, such that he is able to move freely in it and gain some relief. They ask, "Who is your Lord? What is your religion? Who is your Prophet? In what direction do you pray?" One whom God Most High graces with the ability to speak with the utmost assurance responds, "Who assigned you to me? Who sent you to me?"ⁱ But this is granted only to the truly righteous and learned. Then he says, "God is my Lord, Muḥammad is my Prophet, and Islam is my religion." One of the angels tells the other, "He has spoken truly, and he has saved himself from any harm from us." Then they raise the grave around him like a great dome, and open to him a door to Paradise to his

i This could also be understood as "The One Who assigned you to me [is my Lord]."

right, and spread out a carpet of its silks and perfumes below him, and let sweet breezes blow upon him from it. His deeds come to him in the images of the people he loves most, and they keep him company and converse with him, and his grave is filled with light. He will remain in joy and delight for as long as the world endures, until the Last Hour comes; yet he will always be asking when that will be, for there is nothing he desires more than its coming.

Below him in rank is the believer who did good deeds but had no share in religious knowledge or the mysteries of the spiritual world. His deeds will come to him in the guise of a beautiful figure adorned in fine clothing and pleasant perfume, and will ask him, "Do you not recognize me?" He will say, "Who are you, that God has graced me with your presence here in my loneliest hour?" The figure will reply, "I am your righteous deeds. Do not grieve or worry. Soon Munkar and Nakirⁱ will come to question you. Do not be alarmed." Then the figure will tell him how to answer them. As he is doing so, they will arrive in the same appearance as described before. They will reproach him and make him sit upright, and ask him: "Who is your Lord?" and so on as before. He will reply clearly without stumbling, "God is my Lord, Muḥammad is my Prophet, the Qur'ān is my guide, Islam is my religion, the Ka'ba is my prayer-direction, Abraham is my father, and his creed is my creed." They will say to him, "You have spoken truly," and they will do as they did for the other, except that they will open a door to Hell on his left so that he can see its serpents, scorpions, chains, and fetters, its boiling water, monstrous trees, festering pus, and all its horrors. This will alarm him, but they will tell him, "None of this evil will touch you. That is where your home in Hell would have been, had God Most High not given you a home in Paradise instead. Sleep soundly." Then they will close that door to Hell and

i The aforementioned Inquisitors.

open a door to Heaven. He will be unaware of the passage of time as the months, years, and ages slip by.

Then there are those who stumble as they give their answers to the angels. One such will not be able to say "God is my Lord" if he believes otherwise, but will say something else instead. The angels will deal him a blow that sets his grave ablaze. The fire will then go out for a few days, then blaze again, and this will go on for as long as the world endures. Another will be unable to say "Islam is my religion" because of doubts he may have harbored or temptations that visited him in his final hours. He too will be dealt a blow that sets his grave ablaze, as before. Another will be unable to say "The Qur'ān is my guide," for although he used to recite it, he did not heed it or act in accordance with its commandments or prohibitions. He circled around it all his life but never allowed himself to reap its fruits. He will receive the same fate as the others. Another will find his deeds transformed into a dog that torments him in his grave until his crimes are repaid. Another will find his deeds transformed into a piglet. Another will find himself unable to say, "Muḥammad is my Prophet" because he neglected his Sunna. Another will be unable to say "The Ka'ba is my prayer-direction" because he was not careful to pray towards it, or performed his ablutions invalidly, or was given to turning here and there during his prayer, or performed his bows and prostrations incorrectly. There are many narrations to this effect, and it is enough to consider that God does not accept the prayer of one who performs it mindlessly or while wearing unlawful clothing. Another will be unable to say, "Abraham is my father" because at some point he heard someone imply that Abraham was a Jew or a Christian, and began to entertain doubts about this. He will receive the same fate as the others. We have disclosed all these various eventualities in the *Iḥyā'*.



As for the thoroughly ungodly man, when the angels ask him who is his Lord he replies, "I do not know." They say, "Do you not know? Have you no idea?" Then they beat him with those iron rods until he is driven down to the seventh earth. The earth then expels him back into his grave, and they beat him seven more times. After that stage, the experiences of the wicked are varied. Some of them find their deeds transformed into dogs that savage them until the Day of Resurrection; these are the Khārijites.¹ Others find their deeds transformed into swine that torment them in the grave; these are the skeptics. There are many others besides, but we shall limit ourselves to these. The basic reality of it is that an individual is tormented in his grave by what he feared in life. There are those who fear dogs more than lions, for everyone's nature is different. We ask God for safety and forgiveness, before it is too late!

There are many accounts of dreams in which dead people were seen and asked about their fates. One answered that because of a prayer he had performed without ablution God sent a wolf to frighten him in his grave, greatly distressing him.

Another answered when asked what God had done with him, "Leave me be! One day I did not bother to perform the major ritual ablution, and so God garbed me in a robe of fire in which I writhe."

Another said, "The man who washed my body for burial handled me roughly, and a nail on the table scraped me, causing me pain." The next morning, the person who had that dream went to the washer and asked him about this. He replied, "I did do that, but I did not mean to!"

Another man dreamed he saw a dead person and asked him, "How are you? Did you not die?" He replied, "Indeed I did. I am well, except that a stone broke my rib as the soil was being heaped

i A sect which originated during the first Islamic century and has undergone a revival during recent decades. One of their main beliefs was that anyone who committed what they judged a major sin was an unbeliever.

upon me, which hurt me." The grave was unearthed, and they found that indeed it was so.

Another dead man visited his son in a dream and said, "Son! Repair your father's house, for the rain has disturbed it." In the morning he sent someone to check on his father's grave; they found that a stream had formed from rainwater and had run over it, and the grave was flooded.

A Bedouin man related that he asked his dead son in a dream, "What has God done with you?" He replied, "Nothing has harmed me, except that I was buried beside So-and-so, who was a wicked man, and the punishment he suffers alarms me."

There are many similar tales of how the dead suffer pain in their graves. Sufficient proof of this is found in the words of the Lawgiver ﷺ: "The dead man in the grave suffers pain just as the living man does in his house." The Messenger of God ﷺ forbade breaking the bones of the dead. He once passed by a man sitting upon a grave and forbade him to do so, saying, "Do not offend the dead in their graves." The Prophet ﷺ once visited the grave of his mother Āmina and wept, as did those accompanying him. Then he said, "I asked my Lord permission to pray for forgiveness for her, but He did not permit me. Then I asked His permission to visit her grave, and He permitted me. Visit graves, for they remind one of death" (Muslim 976). When he went to visit graveyards, he ﷺ would say, "Peace be upon the folk of these homes, the Muslims and believers! God willing, we shall join you. You are our predecessors, and we are your successors. Dear God, forgive us and them, and grant us and them Your pardon, by Your grace!" He taught his womenfolk to say the same when they went to visit their dead.

Šālih al-Muzanī said, "I asked a certain jurist why he forbade praying in cemeteries. He cited the hadith, 'Do not pray among graves, for to do so would only arouse infinite regrets [among the deceased].'" Someone related, "Once on a very hot day, I was standing in prayer in a graveyard when I saw a figure resembling my father standing over his grave. I fell down prostrate fearfully, and I heard him say, 'Has the spacious earth become so narrow for you that you have to come here to disturb us with your prayer after all this time?'"

An authentic hadith relates how the Messenger of God ﷺ once passed by an orphan weeping over his father's grave. The Prophet ﷺ wept too, out of compassion, then said, "The dead are tormented by the weeping of the living for them" (Bukhārī 1290). What this means is that this weeping saddens and depresses them. Many a dead person has been seen in a dream and, when asked how he fared, answered, "I am saddened by those who weep too much for me." Only heretics deny this.

An authentic hadith states that the Messenger of God ﷺ said, "When any one of you passes by the grave of his brother in faith whom he knew in the world and greets him, he recognizes him and returns the greeting."¹ The Prophet ﷺ also related that the deceased could hear their footfalls as they walked from the grave; and if he could hear that, he must have been able to hear so much more.

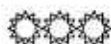
Once a learned man died without leaving a will, but was then seen by several people in dreams roaming around his house by night saying, "Give to So-and-so such-and-such a measure of crops, and return So-and-so's book to him which I borrowed a long time ago." In the morning when they discussed the matter and realized they had all had the same dream, they gave that man the crops and

i I have not been able to identify this figure, unless it is Dāwūd ibn Abi Šālih the hadith transmitter.

looked for the book, but could not find it. This disquieted them, but then some time later they found it in a nook of the house.

Another man related, "Our father employed a man to teach us how to read and write at home. Then he died, and six days later he went to visit his grave. While we were there, we began to discuss certain things about God Almighty. Somebody passed by with a plate of figs, so we bought it and ate them, and we threw the stems onto the grave. That night, our father saw the teacher in a dream. He asked him how he was, and he replied, 'I am well, except that your children used my grave as a refuse dump and said things in my presence that were tantamount to unbelief!' Our father confronted us about this, and we said, 'Glory be to God! Even in his Afterlife he is still scolding us!'"

There are many such accounts, but I have mentioned only a few here by way of example. Let the few stand for the many.





CHAPTER 5

THE FOUR STATIONS OF THE INTERWORLD (*BARZAKH*)

The inhabitants of the grave themselves occupy four stations. Some of them lie there until they rot away to dust, after which they continue to roam around the spiritual world below the lowest heaven. Others God puts into a slumber so they do not know their fate until they wake at the first blast of the Trumpet, whereupon they die again. Others remain only two or three months in their grave before their souls mount birds which bear them up to Paradise, as is described in an authentic hadith wherein the Lawgiver ﷺ says, "The soul of a believer is a bird roosting in the trees of Paradise."¹ Another hadith with a sound transmission and an authentic meaning states that when asked about the spirits of the martyrs, he ﷺ replied, "Their spirits are within the breasts of green birds roosting in the trees of Paradise" (Tirmidhi 1641).² There are those who, the moment they pass away, are taken up to the Trumpet, where they remain until it is sounded.

The fourth station is reserved for the Prophets and saints, who are given the choice. Some choose to roam the earth until the Last Hour, and so are frequently seen in dreams. I believe that Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddiq and ʿUmar al-Fārūq are among them. The Messenger ﷺ

was allowed to choose to roam all three worlds, and it was to this choice that he referred when he said, "God honors me too greatly to leave me upon the earth for more than three." This meant three decades, for Ḥusaynⁱ ﷺ was slain at the beginning of the thirtieth year,ⁱⁱ whereupon he ﷺ became angry at the people on earth and ascended to Heaven. One of the righteous saw him in a dream and asked, "Messenger of God, may my parents be your ransom—what do you say about the tribulations of your Community?" He replied, "May God increase their tribulation! For they slew Ḥusayn, and forgot that to honor him was to honor me..." And he said some other things that the narrator could not grasp.

Then there are those who choose the seventh heaven, such as Abraham ﷺ. A hadith states that during the Ascension the Prophet ﷺ passed him as he leaned his back against al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr (the Frequent House),ⁱⁱⁱ with Muslim children flocking around him. Jesus ﷺ is in the fifth heaven. Each heaven contains Prophets and Messengers who will never leave it until the end of time. Only five of them have the choice to depart before then: Abraham the Friend, Moses the Confidant, Jesus the Spirit, Adam the Chosen, and Muḥammad the Beloved. These five may go wherever they please in the worlds. As for the saints, some of them stay in one place awaiting the earthly Resurrection; it is related that Abū Yazīd^{iv} is beneath the Throne, eating from an outspread banquet.

i The grandson of the Prophet ﷺ through 'Alī and Fāṭima, infamously martyred at Karbalā' in 61/680.

ii It is unclear what the author means by this, as Ḥusayn's martyrdom took place fifty years after the passing of the Prophet ﷺ (see previous footnote). Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalānī quotes this statement by, or attributed to, al-Ghazālī in *Talkhīṣ al-ḥabir* (2/254, ed. Ḥusayn ibn Qurṭb; Qurṭuba Institute, 1995) with "sixtieth" rather than "thirtieth," and calls this "an astounding and blatant error."

iii This is how the Ka'ba is named in Qur'ān 52:4; here it means the celestial Ka'ba, the prototype of the earthly one.

iv Al-Baṣṭāmī, the renowned Persian Sufi saint (d. 234/874).

These, then, are the four conditions of the inhabitants of the grave; some tormented, others shown mercy; some disgraced, others honored. Those who roam the earth surround the dying person, crowding his environs; and they may be revealed to him, so that he can see or sense them. I have experience of people telling of this; a friend of mine told me that he saw his deceased son come into the house, fully formed and conscious. Such other-worldly gifts are granted only to the virtuous and the noble. We ask God Most High to grant us knowledge of Him that allows us to plunge into the depths of such mysteries, dispelling all doubt and uncertainty.

Among all the above categories, none of the deceased are aware of the passage of night and day except those whose individuality endures here below rather than ascending above. Some of them are aware of the occasions of Friday and the feast days. When someone leaves the world, [those whom he knew] gather around his soul and recognize him. One might ask about his wife, another about his child, and another about his father, each enquiring after his own concerns. Other times a newly dead soul may not encounter any of his acquaintances because at the moment of death he was misled into dying as a Jew or a Christian, and so he will pass on to their communities instead. Then when another of his acquaintances dies, his neighbors ask him, "What can you tell us of So-and-so?" When he tells them that he has died, they say, "Truly we belong to God, and truly to Him we shall return! He has fallen. *His home shall be the Abyss* (Qur'ān 101:9)."

Once a dead man was seen in a dream and asked his fate. He replied, "I am well, and so are my five companions," naming five men alongside whom he had been slain by rebels. When asked about the fate of another neighbor of his who had died, he replied, "We have not seen him." The man had thrown himself into the sea and drowned, and I believe—but God knows best—that his death was a suicide. An authentic hadith states that the Messenger of

God ﷻ said, "If a man kills himself with a blade, on the Day of Resurrection he will bear that blade in his hand, and he will stab his belly with it amid the fires of Hell, forever and ever" (Muslim 175). Thus anyone who kills himself will continue to experience the moment of his death: if a man jumped to his death from a mountain, he will fall upon his skull into the fires of Hell; if a woman was [justly] executed, she will continue to feel the pain of the execution until the Trumpet is sounded. That is the second life.

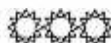
It is authentically narrated that Adam ﷺ met Moses ﷺ, who said to him: "You are the one whom God created with His Hand, and into whom He blew of His Spirit, to whom He made His angels prostrate, and whom He made to dwell in His Garden. Why, then, did you disobey Him?" He replied, "Moses, you are the one whom God took as His Confidant, and to whom He revealed the Torah which, as you know, tells of how Adam disobeyed his Lord." Moses replied, "Indeed, that is so." Adam said, "Then how many years do you suppose that sin was destined for me before I committed it?" Moses replied, "It was destined fifty thousand years before you committed it." Adam said, "Moses, will you really blame me for committing a sin for which I was destined fifty thousand years before?" (Bukhārī 3409).

An authentic hadith states that the Messenger of God ﷺ led the Messengers in two cycles of prayer on the night of his Ascension, and that he met Aaron ﷺ, who prayed that he and his Community be blessed with mercy, and met with Idrīs,ⁱ who prayed the same. These were all men who had died and left the world, but this was the life of the soul; it is after the Resurrection that the second life comes. The first life was the day on which *He made them testify against themselves, 'Am I not your Lord?' They said, 'Indeed yes, we testify!'* (Qur'ān 7:172). The life of the world does not count,

i Usually identified with Enoch.

for it is no more than a masquerade of supposed delight. It is related that the Prophet ﷺ said, "People are asleep; when they die, they awaken."ⁱ

These, then, are the possible conditions of the dead once they have given up the ghost. Some remain in the grave, others roam, others are confined, and others are tormented. The proof of this is found in the words of God Most High: *The Fire is exposed to them morning and evening. And on the Day the Hour comes: 'Admit the folk of Pharaoh into the most terrible punishment!'* (Qur'ān 40:46). This clearly describes the torment in the isthmus (*barzakh*) between death and resurrection.



i This saying has been attributed to many early Islamic figures including Imam 'Alī, and is often presented as a hadith although it lacks a chain of transmission according to 'Irāqī in *Takhrīj al-Iḥyā'*.



CHAPTER 6

THE LAST HOUR

When God Most High decrees for the Last Hour to come, the Trumpet will be sounded, in the manner we have explained in depth in the *Ihyā'*.ⁱ The mountains will float away like clouds. The seas will run into one another. The sun will be folded up and rendered ashen black. The oceans will rise up until all the atmosphere is filled with water. The barriers between the worlds will become porous. The stars will be scattered like a broken string of pearls. The skies will become ruddy like rose oil, turning like a mill. The earth will tremble violently, expanding and contracting like the skin of a bellows. Finally God Most High will give the command for the heavenly spheres to collapse, and every single being in the seven earths and seven heavens, even up to the Footstool itself, will yield up its soul. Even the purely spiritual [angelic] beings will give up their spirits. Heaven and earth alike will be completely devoid of inhabitants of any kind.

Then God Almighty will manifest Himself in the clouds, seizing the seven heavens in His right hand and the seven earths in His left. He will say, "Insignificant world, where are your lords? Where are

ⁱ In Book 40, on "The Remembrance of Death and Follows It."

your companions, whom you tempted with your baubles, distracting them from their Afterlives with your trinkets?" Then He will laud Himself with whatever words He chooses, and declare His eternal subsistence, His perpetual glory, His enduring sovereignty, His all-conquering power, His endless wisdom. Then He will say three times, *Whose is sovereignty this Day?* There will be none to answer Him, so He will answer Himself: *God's, the One, the All-Vanquishing!* (Qur'ān 40:16). Then He will do something more tremendous still, which is to take the heavens on one finger and the earths on another and twirl them, saying, "I am the King! I am the King! Where are those who worshipped any other but Me, and associated others with Me, though it was My provision that they consumed? Where are those who used My blessings as fuel to disobey Me? Where are the tyrants? Where are the proud and the terrible? Whose is sovereignty this day, if not Mine?" He will continue thus for as long as He wills, with not a single soul from the highest heights of the Throne to the depths of the deepest pit to hear Him. Even the maidens and youths of Paradise will have their hearing silenced.

Then God Most High will uncover a well in the depths of Hell, from which a tongue of flame will emerge, igniting the fourteen oceans like fire igniting dry wool, until not a drop of them remains. The earths will become like black charcoal, the heavens like oil dregs and molten copper. When the blaze is so high it threatens to engulf the farthest limits of the sky, God will extinguish the fire all at once. It will smolder for a thousand years, but no flames will rise from it.

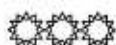
Then God, Incomparably Perfect and Exalted is He, will open one of the treasures of the Throne containing the sea of life, which will rain down upon the earth like semen falling upon the parched, dead soil, causing it to come to life and quiver. The rain will continue to fall until it covers the entire earth forty cubits deep.

There and then, each body will grow from the coccyx. A hadith states that man began from the tailbone and will return from it; according to another narration, "Every part of man will decompose except for the tailbone, from which he began and from which he will return" (Bukhārī 4935). This is a bone the size of a chickpea, containing no marrow. From it all bodies will grow back in their graves like plants, until they become intertwined—one man's head on another's shoulders, one man's hand on another's side, one man's thigh on another's backside, and so on—because of the vast throng of people. This is the meaning of the Words of God Most High: *We know well what the earth diminishes from them, and in Our keeping is an all-preserving Record* (Qur'ān 50:4). There is a great mystery to this, which we examined in the *Iḥyā'*.

Once the re-creation is complete with each person as he was—the child a child, the old man an old man, the adult an adult, the youth a youth—the All-Majestic will command a wind to blow from beneath the Throne containing a subtle fire, leveling the earth so that it is laid bare and flat, without peaks or troughs, and the mountains are reduced to flattened sand. Then God Almighty will revive the angel Isrāfīl ؑ, who will blow the Trumpet atop the Rock of Jerusalem. The Trumpet is a horn of light with fourteen loops, each loop as vast as heaven and earth, and as many holes as human spirits. When it is blown the spirits of mankind will emerge, droning like bees, and fill the earth from East to West. Each soul will go to its body—glory be to the One Who inspires them to do so!—even the birds and the beasts; everything that ever had a spirit. So it will be that, as God says: *The Trumpet will be blown, and all who are in the heavens and all who are on the earth will swoon, save whom God wills. Then it will be blown again, and behold, they will be standing, beholding* (Qur'ān 39:68). Yet it shall be but a single cry, and at once they shall be above ground (Qur'ān 79:13–14). The word *sāhira* in this verse means "level

ground," for when they are resurrected they will open their eyes and see the mountains leveled, the seas drained, and the earth laid bare before them without peaks or troughs, like a sheet of paper. They will be amazed at beholding this level ground, and each of them will sit upon his grave naked, head bowed in stupefaction and contemplation, as the Prophet ﷺ said in an authentic hadith, "Naked and uncircumcised" (Bukhārī 3349).

Exceptions to this will be those believers who died alone in the wilds and so were not given proper burials, and also the martyrs who were buried without shrouds; they will be resurrected wearing clothing from Paradise. Another exception is those of the Community of Muḥammad who followed his Sunna to the very letter; for the Prophet ﷺ said, "Shroud your dead with great care, for my Community will be resurrected with their shrouds, while all others will be resurrected naked." Abu Sufyān narrated this with a chain of transmission.ⁱ He ﷺ also said, "The dead man will be resurrected in his clothing" (Abū Dāwūd 3114), which seems the most credible narration we have seen on the matter. It happened that a certain person asked to be dressed in a particular garment as he lay dying, but the request was not fulfilled and he died in his nightshirt. Several days later, he was seen in a dream looking dejected. When asked what was the matter, he turned away and said, "You denied me my clothes, and doomed me to being resurrected in this nightshirt and nothing else!"



ⁱ Qurtubī notes in *al-Tadhkira* (1/238) that he was unable to find a source for this hadith.



CHAPTER 7

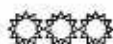
THE INTERVAL BETWEEN THE TRUMPET BLASTS

The period between the two blasts of the Trumpet is the second death, because it spells the cessation of the inward senses just as bodily death does for the outward senses. Bodies may perform motions, but it is not bodies that pray, fast, or worship. If God were to place an angel inside a corpse it would not remain there, because of its natural tendency to gravitate to its own world. The soul is a simple substance, and when it is installed in a body its life and activities are made possible.

People differ regarding the duration of the pause between the two Trumpet-Blasts, but the majority say it will be forty years. A man whose knowledge and wisdom I do not doubt told me that the duration is known to none but God Most High, for it is one of the secrets of Lordship. He also told me that the exemptionⁱ refers to God alone. I therefore asked him the meaning of the Prophet's ﷺ words, "I will be the first for whom the earth opens on the Day of Resurrection. I will encounter my brother Moses holding onto the leg of the Throne. I do not know if he will have

i Meaning the words *save whom God wills* in Qur'ān 79:13.

been revived before me, or if he was one of those whom God Most High exempted" (Bukhārī 2412). He replied, "We can only think that this hadith is referring to souls, not bodies, for Moses does not have a body in the present moment." Perhaps the exemption the Prophet ﷺ meant refers to the panic that mankind will feel as they swoon. Ka'b was once speaking of this moment during an audience with 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb ؓ, and he said, "Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, even if you had the deeds of seventy Prophets to your name, I do not think you would be spared from that Day." None will be spared from that Day except for those whom God Most High exempts from the horror of the panic and the swoon, namely the folk of the fourth station. Without doubt, Moses is one of them. Thus the exemption would refer to the feeling of fear, not to death itself. If anyone were left alive after the first blast, they would be able to answer God when He says, *Whose is sovereignty this Day?*, and would cry out, "It is Yours, O One, O All-Vanquishing!"



i The reply Ghazālī received to his question is presented with great variance between the manuscripts, and it is difficult to make sense of it in any of them.



CHAPTER 8

THE RESURRECTION

Finally each person will be seated upon their graves. Some will be naked, others clothed; some black, others white. Some will have lights like tiny lamps, others like great lamps, others like stars, others like moons, others like suns. Yet all will have their heads bowed, not knowing what will be done with them. Thus they will remain for a thousand years, until a roaring fire comes from the West to drive all mankind to the Gathering. All will turn their heads to it in astonishment—man and jinn, bird and beast. Then the deeds of every person will come to them saying, “Rise, and hasten to the Gathering!” For those who have a truly good deed to their account, that deed will be transformed into a conveyance. For some it will be a ship, for others a mule, for others a donkey, and for others still a sheep that sometimes carries them and sometimes throws them off.

Each of them will be given a ray of light in front of him and another to his right, to guide them through the darkness; as God Most High says, *Their light will shine before them and on their right* (Qur’ān 66:8). There will be no light to their left, but only pitch darkness, totally impenetrable to the sight. The unbelievers will wander lost in it, and the doubters will waver, while the believer

will observe its utter blackness and darkness, and will praise God Almighty for the light He has given him to guide him through it as it shines before him. In this manner God reveals to His blessed faithful servant the state of the wretched, damned ones in order to show him just how fortunate he is, just as He does with the inhabitants of Paradise and Hell: *So he will look, and see him in the midst of Hellfire* (Qur'ān 37:55); *And when their eyes are turned toward the people of Hellfire they will say, 'Our Lord, do not put us with the wrongdoing folk!'* (Qur'ān 7:47). There are four things whose value is known only to four people: none know the value of life but the dead; none know the value of health but the sick; none know the value of youth but the old; and none know the value of wealth but the poor.

There are some whose light will barely reach in front of their own toes and will sometimes go out altogether; for one's light at the Resurrection will be as great as one's faith was in life, and one's steps will be as swift as one's deeds were plentiful.

The Messenger of God ﷺ was asked, according to an authentic hadith, "How will mankind be resurrected, Messenger of God?" He replied, "Two on a camel, or three on a camel, or four on a camel, or five on a camel, or ten on a camel" (Nasā'i 2085). The meaning of this hadith—and God knows best—is that God Most High will have mercy upon people who came together in friendship for the sake of Islam, and transform their deeds into camels for them to ride; but those whose deeds were scant will have to share. They are like people who set out on a long journey without any of them having enough money to buy a mount to ride, so two or three of them pool their funds to buy one to share and take turns riding it. But how far can a single camel bear ten men? To perform only a few good deeds is like being tight-fisted with money. Yet despite this, God decrees that they be saved. I urge you, then—may God guide you—to do enough work to procure a camel for yourself,

so that you are not forced to share one; for that is the enterprise that is truly profitable.

The God-conscious will arrive as honored guests; as the Almighty says, *On the Day We shall gather the Godfearing to the All-Merciful as honored guests* (Qur'ān 19:85). A rare narration tells of how the Messenger of God ﷺ said one day to his Companions, "There was a man of the Israelites who did so much good that he will be resurrected in your company." They said, "Messenger of God, what did he do?" He replied, "He inherited a great fortune from his father, and purchased an orchard which he donated to the poor, saying, 'This will be my orchard in the presence of God.' Then he distributed much gold among the needy, saying, 'With this I purchase a maiden and slaves in the presence of God Most High.' Then he freed many slaves and said, 'These will be my servants in the presence of God.' One day he saw a blind man who went walking and stumbling along, and so he bought him a mount to ride and said, 'This will be my mount in the presence of God.' By Him in Whose hand is my soul, I can picture it being led to him, saddled and bridled for him to ride to the Standing-Place!"ⁱ

It has been said that the Words of God Most High, *Is one who walks prone upon his face better guided, or one who walks upright on a straight path?* (Qur'ān 67:22) are a parable of how the believers and unbelievers will be brought forth at the Resurrection, as are His Words, *Exalted is He, And We shall drive the guilty into Hell, a thirsty herd* (Qur'ān 19:86), meaning like cattle upon their faces. The One Who made them walk upon their feet in the world is certainly able to make them walk upon their faces in the Hereafter. Some exegetes hold this opinion, citing God's Words, *We shall gather them on the Day of Resurrection upon their faces*

i I have not been able to find a source for this hadith. Qurṭubī quotes it in *al-Tadhkira*, but without providing any source other than Ghazālī here.

(Qur'ān 17:97). But it is not so; in fact, what it means is that they will sometimes walk and other times be dragged upon their faces. That interpretation is unsound because God speaks of feet, saying, *The Day their tongues, their hands, and their feet testify against them regarding what they used to do* (Qur'ān 24:24). His Words *blind, dumb, and deaf* (Qur'ān 17:97) also bear an interpretation other than the one advanced by those exegetes which breaks with the allusion we have just outlined. I have observed that the Arabs use this phrase figuratively, saying that a man is "walking upon his face" to mean that he is crawling. What it means, then, is that the unbeliever is blind to the light that shines in front of and to the right of the believers, not that he is totally blind; for it is beyond dispute that they will see the heavens rent asunder by clouds, the angels descend, the mountains float away, the stars scatter, and all the horrors of the Resurrection. Hence God says, *Is this sorcery, then, or do you not see?* (Qur'ān 52:15).

Blindness in the Hereafter, then, means being plunged into darkness and unable to gaze upon the All-Generous One. For although the light of God will shine upon the entire earth, their sight will be covered so that they cannot behold it. Their ears too will be blocked so that they cannot hear the Words of God Most High, nor the angels who call, *Enter Paradise! No fear shall come upon you, nor shall you grieve* (Qur'ān 7:49); *Enter Paradise, you and your spouses, made joyous!* (Qur'ān 43:70). They will also be prevented from speaking, as if they were dumb; as God Most High says, *This is the Day they will not speak, nor be permitted to offer excuses* (Qur'ān 77:35-36). When a person is denied something he can be described as lacking the power for it, even if it is still potentially there. Thus they will be *blind, dumb, and deaf* virtually, if not actually.

Some will be resurrected with whatever thing held them infatuated in the world. A man who was infatuated by the lute and

whiled away his hours strumming it will find it in his right hand when he rises from his grave. He will throw it aside, saying, "Away with you! You kept me from invoking God Most High!" But it will return to him saying, "I shall be your companion *until God judges between us. He is the best of judges* (Qur'ān 7:87)." Just so, drunkards will be resurrected drunk, pipers piping, each returning to whatever condition it was that kept him from the way of God. An authentic hadith states that a wine-drinker will be resurrected with a jug hanging from his neck and a cup in his hand, and will reek more foully than any corpse on earth; every one of mankind who passes him will curse him.

The dead will also be resurrected with the marks of the wrongdoing done to them. An authentic hadith relates that someone who was slain in God's cause will come forth at the Resurrection with blood seeping from his wounds—blood with the color of blood but the scent of musk—until he stands before God Almighty (Bukhārī 237).

Then the angels will muster them forth in droves, each of them in their own unique condition, each one riding the mount destined for him. They will gather upon a single plain, all of creation from the first to the last. Then the Almighty will command the angels of the lowest heaven to take charge of them. Each of them will take one of the resurrected, be it human, jinn, bird, or beast, and bear them to the second earth, which is a white earth of luminous silver. All of the angels will surround the throng in a great ring, ten times more numerous than the inhabitants of earth. Then God will command the angels of the second heaven to form a ring around them all, twenty times their number. Then the angels of the third heaven will descend and surround them all in a great ring, thirty times their number. Then the angels of the fourth heaven will do the same, forty times their number; then the angels of the fifth heaven, fifty times their number; then the angels of the sixth heaven, sixty

times their number; then the angels of the seventh heaven, seventy times their number.

Creation will mingle and press together until one foot will stand atop a thousand other feet, so tightly squeezed they will be. People will wade in sweat up to their necks, their shoulders, their chests, their waists, or their knees. Some will experience no more than the light perspiration induced by a sauna, while others will be soaked like a thirsty man gulping and spilling water over himself. The damp ones will be upon pulpits, the wetted ones will be upon chairs, and those steeped up to their ankles will be those who died of drowning. The angels will call to them, *No fear shall come upon you, nor shall you grieve!* (Qur'ān 7:49). One of the sages told me that they are the truly penitent, such as Fuḍayl ibn 'Iyād.ⁱ The Prophet ﷺ used to say, "One who repents of sin is as if sinless" (Ibn Mājah 4250), which is a definitive statement. These three groups, then—the damp, the wetted, and those steeped up to their ankles—will be the ones with white faces, while the rest will have black faces.

Small wonder that this will be a time of great agitation, sweat, and restlessness! For the sun will be so near their heads that they could reach up and touch it, and it will be seventy times hotter. One of the early Muslims said that if the sun rose over the earth now as it will at the Resurrection, it would set the land ablaze, melt the rocks, and dry the rivers.

All creation will throng together on that white earth, as God Most High describes when He says, *The Day the earth will be changed into other than the earth, and the sky also, and they will come forth to God, the One, the All-Vanquishing* (Qur'ān 14:48). They will be in varying condition in the Gathering Ground. The

i An early Sufi sage and ascetic, who was a highway robber before his repentance (d. 187/803).

kings of the world will be like motes, as is stated in a tradition about the imperious. They will not literally be like motes in a physical sense, but they will be so trodden upon that they will be as humbled as specks of dust.

There are those who will drink cool sweet pure water, for youths will wait upon them with cups from the rivers of Paradise. One of the early Muslims related that he dreamed that the Resurrection had come, and that he was standing thirsty at the Gathering Ground, as young children passed out drinks to people. He called to them, "Give me a drink of water!" One of them said to him, "Is one of us your child?" He replied, "No." The child said, "In that case, no." That is one of the benefits of marriage. Certain conditions have to be met in order to receive a drink from one of these youths; we have detailed them in the *Iḥyāʾ*.

Some will be granted shade to protect them from the heat. This is the goodly charity they gave in the world.

They will remain this way for a thousand years until they hear the Horn (*nāqūr*) being blown, as we have described in the *Iḥyāʾ*. This is one of the mysteries of the Qurʾān.ⁱ Its terrible roar will make hearts tremble and eyes flutter, and the heads of all, believers and unbelievers alike, will turn to it, expecting that the torments of the Day of Resurrection are about to grow even worse. Then the Throne will come forth, borne by eight angels whose every pace covers the distance of a journey of twenty thousand years. Angels will come flocking through the clouds singing glorifications so tremendous that the mind can scarcely imagine it. The Throne will settle upon that white earth, created by God Most High solely for this purpose. Heads will bow, and souls will fall silent. Humanity will be stricken with apprehension; even the Prophets will fear, the

i The word *nāqūr* occurs only in Qurʾān 74:8, while elsewhere the Trumpet is called the *ṣūr*; this suggests, as the author implies here, that the two may be distinct.

sages will dread, and the saints and martyrs will cower before the punishment of God, which none can bear.

As they stand there trembling, they will be bathed in a light from God Almighty more powerful than the sun in whose heat they had been suffering. They will throng together in panic for another thousand years, without the Almighty speaking a single word to them. Then mankind will go to Adam ﷺ and say, "Adam, Father of Mankind, this is unbearable for us!" The unbeliever will say, "Lord, release me from this, even if it be into Hell!", so appalling will be the terrors he can see.

They will say, "Adam, you whom God created with His own Hand, and to whom He made His angels prostrate, and into whom He blew of His Spirit, intercede for us with your Lord, that He may render final judgment!"—asking that He pass judgment as He will, Infinitely Perfect and Exalted is He, and do with them as He pleases.

Adam will reply, "I disobeyed God Most High when He forbade me from eating from the tree. I would be ashamed to speak to Him at such a time. Go to Noah ﷺ, for he was the first of the Messengers."

They will discuss the matter for a thousand years, and then go to Noah ﷺ and say, "You were the first of the Messengers," and ask for his intercession as they had asked for Adam's ﷺ. He will reply, "I uttered a prayer for which all upon earth were drowned.ⁱ I would be ashamed to ask such a thing of God again. Go to Abraham, for he is the Friend of the All-Merciful, and *he named you Muslims aforetime* (Qur'ān 22:78). Perhaps he will intercede for you."

They will discuss the matter for a thousand years, and then go to Abraham ﷺ and say, "Abraham, Father of the Muslims, you are

ⁱ And Noah said, 'My Lord, do not leave a single disbeliever to dwell upon the earth...' (Qur'ān 71:26).

the one whom God chose as a Friend. Intercede for us with God Most High, that He may render final judgment upon mankind!"

Abraham will reply, "I told three untruths regarding Islam in order to debate on behalf of the religion of God.¹ I would be ashamed to intercede with God at such a time. But go to Moses ﷺ, for God took him as His Confidant and chose him for intimate discourse. Perhaps he will intercede for you."

They will discuss the matter for a thousand years, as all the while the conditions worsen and the crush tightens. Then they will go to Moses ﷺ and say, "Son of 'Imrān, God took you as His Confidant and chose you for intimate discourse, and revealed to you the Torah. Intercede for us with your Lord, that He may render final judgment! We cannot bear to endure this throng any longer, piled up on one another like this! All mankind, Muslims and unbelievers alike, are crying out for release!"

Moses ﷺ will reply, "I asked God to afflict the people of Pharaoh with famine and to make an example of them for the ages, and I slew a soul. I would be ashamed to intercede with God at such a time; for I have said things to Him in confidence that would have

i The Qur'ān recounts two occasions on which Abraham told untruths to his people: once when he tells them that the largest idol was responsible for breaking the others (Qur'ān 21:63), and again when he pleads sickness so as to drive them away from him (Qur'ān 37:89). A hadith tells of the third lie: he instructed his wife Sarah to pretend to be his sister because he knew that a tyrant king would abduct her if he knew her to be his wife (Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* 2217). Alternatively, the "three untruths" may refer to this passage: *Thus did We show Abraham the dominion of the heavens and the earth, that he might be of those possessing certainty. When night darkened around him, he saw a star and said, 'This is my Lord!' But when it set, he said, 'I love not things that set.' Then when he saw the moon rising, he said, 'This is my Lord!' But when it set, he said, 'Unless my Lord guides me, I will surely become one of those who are astray.' Then when he saw the sun rising, he said, 'This is my Lord; this is greater!' But when it set, he said, 'O my people, truly I renounce the partners you attribute to God. Truly I have turned my face to Him Who originated the heavens and the earth, as a man of pure faith; and I am not one of the idolaters.'* (Qur'ān 6:75-79).

brought about my ruin, but for His boundless mercy and forgiveness. But go to Jesus ﷺ, for of all Messengers he was foremost in certitude, knowledge of God Most High, asceticism, and wisdom. Perhaps he will intercede for you."

They will discuss the matter for a thousand years, as all the while the conditions worsen and the crush tightens. They will say, "How much longer will we go from one Messenger to another, from one honorable man to another?" Then they will go to Jesus ﷺ and say to him, "You are the Spirit and Word of God, the one whom God Most High called *honored in this world and the Hereafter* (Qur'an 3:45). Intercede for us, that the final judgment be rendered!"

Jesus will reply, "You took me and my mother as gods beside God. How could I intercede for you with the One beside Whom I was worshiped and was called His son, and Who was called my father? Tell me, if one of you had a sealed purse and wanted to get to the money inside, would he not have to break the seal?" They will reply, "Indeed he would, Prophet of God." He will say, "Then go to the Master of Messengers, the Seal of Prophets, my Arab brother. He reserved his supplication to intercede for his Community.ⁱ His people abused him greatly, splitting his forehead and breaking his teeth," calling him a man possessed, though he was the noblest and most honorable of them all. Yet he said to them, as [Joseph] the Supremely Sincere said to his brothers, *There shall be no reproach on you today. May God forgive you, and He is the Most Merciful of the merciful* (Qur'an 12:92)." Jesus will go on listing the virtues of the Prophet ﷺ to them until he convinces them, and their souls are filled with the resolve to go to him.

i "Every Prophet is allowed one supplication that is sure to be answered; I wish to reserve mine to intercede for my Community in the Hereafter." Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* 6304.

ii At the Battle of Uhud.

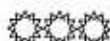
They will go to his pulpit and say, "Messenger of God! You are the Beloved of God, and the beloved is the best mediator. Intercede to God Most High for us! We went to our father Adam, who sent us to Noah, who sent us to Abraham, who sent us to Moses, who sent us to Jesus, who sent us to you, may God bless you and give you peace. There is no one else to seek after you, nor any refuge to be found away from you."

He ﷺ will reply, "I am the one for this, as long as *God grants leave to whom He wills, and approves* (Qur'ān 53:26)." Then he ﷺ will approach the pavilions of Majesty and ask leave to enter. He will be admitted, and the curtain will be lifted. He will fall down in prostration before the Throne for a thousand years, praising God Most High with words of praise that no other has ever uttered. According to one of the gnostics, he will use the very words of praise with which God praised Himself upon completing His creation. The Throne will quiver in tribute to him, and he will have acquired one of the volumes which are mentioned in the *Iḥyā'*.

Meanwhile, the condition of mankind will worsen as they are crushed together ever more tightly and their panic and terror grows. Each will be burdened with the things they stingily refused to give up in the world. The one who refused to pay the zakat on camels will carry upon his shoulders a groaning camel; the one who refused to pay it on cows will carry a bellowing bull; the one who refused to pay it on sheep will carry a bleating ram; the one who refused to pay it on goats will carry a wailing billy-goat, each of them as heavy as a great mountain, their cries as loud as thunder. The one who refused to pay the zakat on crops will carry on his back sacks full of whatever crop he withheld, whether wheat or barley, crying out in lament and woe from beneath them. The one who refused to pay the zakat on money will carry a smooth-skinned serpent with hooded eyes, its tail poking into his nose and winding around his neck, weighing so heavily upon his shoulders that he may as

well be wearing all the millstones in the world on a necklace. All of them will cry out, "What is this?" The angels will reply, "It is what you withheld in the world out of greed and stinginess." This is the meaning of God's Words, *That which they hoard shall be hung about their necks on the Day of Resurrection* (Qur'ān 3:180).

Others will experience a grotesque growth of genitals, from which foul reeking pus will stream, to the disgust of those around them; others will be impaled upon stakes of fire; the tongues of others will loll upon their chests repulsively. These are the adulterers, the sodomites, and the liars. The bellies of some will swell until they are like great mountains; these are the consumers of usury. Each sinner will have his sin manifested openly upon him.





CHAPTER 9

THE INTERCESSION

Then the Almighty will call, "Muhammad! Raise your head! Speak, and you will be heard. Intercede, and it will be granted." He ﷺ will say, "Lord, judge between Your servants! They have stood here so long, and every single one of them has stewed in his sin on the Resurrection grounds." The call will come, "Yes, Muhammad!" God Most High will command that Paradise be adorned and brought nigh, and it will be brought forth, emitting an incomparably lovely fragrance to the distance of a five hundred-year journey. It will cool souls and revive hearts—except for those whose works in the world were foul, for they will be deprived of its fragrance. It will be set down to the right of the Throne.

Then God Most High will command that Hell be brought forth. It will be stricken with dread and panic, and say to the angels sent to it, "Has God created something to torment me?" They will reply to it, "No, by His Glory! He has sent us to you that you may exact vengeance upon those of His creatures who disobeyed Him. It was for this Day that you were created." Then they will bring it forth, walking upon four legs and led by seventy thousand reins, each containing seventy thousand rings, each ring made of more iron than exists in the entire world. Upon each ring will be

seventy thousand Hell-guardians, any one of whom could level every mountain, or crush the entire earth, if commanded to. Hell will bray, moan, roar, and spark, smoke pouring from it until it fills the horizons with darkness. When it gets within a thousand-year journey of mankind, it will slip from the hands of its guardians and approach the people as they stand upon the plain, clanging and roaring and moaning. Someone will cry, "What is this?" The answer will come: "It is Hell, sprung from its guardians!" They will not be able to catch it, so powerful it will be.

All will fall upon their knees, even the Messengers. Abraham, Moses, and Jesus will cling to the Throne; Abraham forgetting all about his son whom he was willing to sacrifice, Moses forgetting Aaron, and Jesus forgetting Mary. Each of them will begin to cry, "Lord, myself, myself! Today I ask You of no other!" It is also related that Christ will say, "Lord, myself and my mother! Today I ask You of no other!" This seems sounder to me. But Muhammad ﷺ will say, "My Community, my Community! Lord, spare them and save them!"

No one upon the plain will have legs strong enough to hold themselves up, which is the meaning of the Words of God Most High, *And you will see every community bow the knee. Every community will be summoned to its record* (Qur'ān 45:28). When Hell escapes, all will fall down before its rage and fury. As God says, *When it sees them from a distant place, they will hear it raging and roaring* (Qur'ān 25:12); *Almost bursting with fury* (Qur'ān 67:8), that is, almost cleft in two by the intensity of its rage.

Then the Messenger of God ﷺ will step forward, by God's command, and seize it by the halter, telling it, "Go back, and wait until your throngs come to you." It will say, "Let me go, Muhammad, for you are forbidden to me." A voice will call from the pavilions of Majesty, "Heed him and obey him!" Then it will be drawn back and placed to the left of the Throne. The people standing upon

the plain will observe it drawing back, and their panic will abate. Thus God Most High says, *And We sent you not save as a mercy for the worlds* (Qur'ān 21:107).

It is then that the Balance will be set up: two scales, one to the right of the Throne, made of light; and another to the left of it, made of darkness.

Then the Almighty, Majestic is He, will lay bare His Shank,ⁱ and all mankind will prostrate in obeisance to Him and humility before His grandeur—except for the unbelievers who associated partners with Him in their earthly lives and worshiped idols of stone and wood for which no authority was sent down from on high. Their backbones will be transformed into iron so that they will not be able to prostrate; as God Most High says: *The day a Shank is laid bare, and they are summoned to prostrate but cannot* (Qur'ān 68:42). Bukhārī relates that the Messenger of God ﷺ said, "God Most High will lay bare His Shank on the Day of Resurrection, and every believing man and woman will fall down prostrate (Ṣaḥīḥ 4919)."

I am reluctant to offer any figurative interpretation for this hadith, and I have nothing to do with those who reject it. I have the same reluctance when it comes to the description of the Balance, and I disagree with those who say that it is purely symbolic. But I consider this as pertaining to the spiritual world, for good and

i The baring of the Shank is referred to in the verse cited below and also in several hadiths, including a long one narrated by Ibn Mas'ūd, describing how at the Resurrection mankind will be shown a parade of the false gods they worshiped in the world and will be deceived by them, but the Muslims will be unimpressed: "The herald will then ask them, 'Why are you not setting off like the rest of mankind?' They will reply, 'We have a Lord, but we have yet to see Him.' He will say, 'And how would you recognize your Lord if you were to see Him?' They will reply, 'There is a sign between us and Him. When we see that sign, we will recognize it.' He will say, 'And what is that sign?' They will reply, 'That He lays bare His Shank.'" (Dāraquṭnī, *Sunan* 116.)

bad deeds are accidents, not substances, and accidents can only be weighed in the spiritual world.

As mankind are prostrating, the Almighty will call with a voice equally audible to all regardless of distance, "I am the Sovereign! I am the Judge!", as al-Bukhārī relates.¹ "The wrongdoing of the wrongdoer cannot elude Me. If it eluded Me, I would be the wrongdoer!" Then He will judge between the ruminants, allowing the hornless ones to exact vengeance from the horned. And between the beasts and birds. Then He will say to them: "Be dust!", and they will be leveled to the earth. Those who disbelieved and disobeyed the Messenger will envy them, and the unbeliever will say, *Oh, would that I were dust!* (Qur'ān 78:40).

Then the call will come from God Most High, "Where is the Preserved Tablet?" It will be brought forth, greatly agitated. God Most high will say, "Where is that which was recorded upon you from the Torah (*Tawrah*), the *Zabūr*, the Evangel (*Injil*), and the Qur'ān (*Furqān*)?"² It will reply, "The Trusty Spirit [Gabriel] took it from me." He will be brought forward, his knees and shoulders trembling. God Most High will say, "Gabriel, the Tablet here claims that you took My Word and My Revelation from it. Is that so?" He will reply, "Yes, Lord." He will say, "What did you do with it?" He will reply, "I took the Torah to Moses, the *Zabūr* to David, the Evangel to Jesus, and the Qur'ān to Muḥammad ﷺ. I took each Messenger his Message, and each people of Scripture their Scripture."

Then the call will go out for Noah, and he will be brought forward, his knees and shoulders trembling. God will say, "Noah! Gabriel claims that you were one of the Messengers." He will reply, "That is so." He will say, "What did you do with your people?"

¹ *Al-Furqān*, "the Criterion," is another name for the Qur'ān.

He will reply, *My Lord, I called my people night and day, but my calling only increased their evasion* (Qur'ān 71:5-6).

The call will go out: "People of Noah!" They will be brought forward all at once, and told: "You brother Noah here claims that he conveyed the Message to you." They will reply, "Our Lord, he lies! He conveyed no such thing!", denying the Message. God Most High will say, "Noah, have you any proof against them?" He will reply, "Yes, Lord. My proof against them is Muḥammad and his Community." They will say, "How can that be, when we were the first and they were the last?" The Prophet ﷺ will be brought forth, and God Most High will say to him, "Muḥammad! Noah here calls you to bear witness. Will you testify that he conveyed the message?" He ﷺ will recite, *Truly We sent Noah to his people* (Qur'ān 71:1) to the end of the chapter.

The Almighty will say, "The truth has condemned you, and punishment has been pronounced upon the unbelievers!" Then he will command that they be swept off to Hell all together, without any weighing of deeds or reckoning.

Then He will call, "Where are 'Ād!", and He will do the same with their Prophet Hūd as He did with Noah. The Prophet ﷺ and the best of his Community will testify against them, reciting, *'Ād denied the Messengers...* [Q 26:123] to the end of the account, and they will be condemned to Hell.

Then He will call for Thamūd and their Prophet Šāliḥ, and when they deny He will call the Prophet ﷺ to testify against them. He will recite, *Thamūd denied the Messengers...* (Qur'ān 26:141) to the end of the account, and they will have the same fate.

He will go on summoning one Community after another of those whose stories are told plainly in the Qur'ān, as well as those who are alluded to in it, such as in His Words, *and many generations in between* (Qur'ān 25:38); *Then We sent Our Messengers in succession. Whenever there came to a Community its Messenger,*

they denied him (Qur'ān 23:44); *Have there not come to you the tidings of those before you—the people of Noah, and 'Ād, and Thamūd, and those after them? None knows them save God. Their Messengers brought them clear signs* (Qur'ān 14:9). Such passages cover various profligate communities.ⁱ This will go on until the nations of Rass,ⁱⁱ Tubba',ⁱⁱⁱ and the people of Abraham are reached. None of them will have their deeds weighed in the Balance or given any reckoning; *On that Day they shall be veiled from their Lord* (Qur'ān 83:15). Only an interpreter will address them, for God does not punish those whom He looks upon and addresses directly.

Then Moses son of 'Imrān will be sent for, and he will be brought forward shaking like a leaf in a gale, pale-faced and weak-kneed. [God] will say to him, "Son of 'Imrān! Gabriel says that he conveyed the Message and the Torah to you. Do you testify that he did?" He will reply, "I do." He will say, "Return to your pulpit and recite what was revealed to you of the Book of your Lord." He will ascend the pulpit and recite, and everyone standing upon the plain will listen. The Torah will come forth fresh and new, as beautiful as the day it was sent down; the rabbis will think that they are hearing it for the first time.

Then David will be sent for, and he will be brought forward shaking like a leaf in a gale, weak-kneed and pale-faced. God Most High will say, "David! Gabriel says that he conveyed the *Zabūr* to you. Do you testify that he did?" He will reply, "I do." He will say, "Return to your pulpit and recite what was revealed to you." He will ascend the pulpit and recite with the most beautiful of all voices; an authentic narration states that his voice is a flute of

i The names of some of these nations are listed here, but with great variance between the manuscripts, and none of them are clear.

ii As mentioned in Qur'ān 25:38 and 50:12.

iii As mentioned in Qur'ān 44:37 and 50:14.

Paradise. The one who was slain before the Ark of Tranquilityⁱ will hear his voice and come jostling through the crowds and stepping through the lines until he reaches David ﷺ, whereupon he will grab hold of him and say, "Did the *Zabūr* not give you admonition enough to prevent you from doing such evil to me?" This will shame him into silence, and a shiver will run through the people as they behold David's condition. Then he will take hold of him and urge him to God, who will drop a veil of concealment over them. Uriah will say, "Lord, give me justice for what he did to me! He deliberately sent me to my death and made me fight before the Ark until I was slain; and then he married my wife, though he had ninety-nine other wives at the time!" The Majestic Almighty will turn to David and say, "Is what he says true?" David will reply, "Yes, Lord, it is," hanging his head in shame before God, awaiting His punishment yet daring to hope for His promised forgiveness. Each time the fear takes him, he will lower his head in shame before God; and when the hope arises, he will lift it. God Most High will say to Uriah, "I hereby recompense for that you with so many palaces, lovely wide-eyed maidens, and youthful servants. Are you satisfied?" He will reply, "Yes, Lord, I am satisfied." Then He will say to David, "Go, for I have forgiven you." Such is His way with those whom He honors; He gives them a great bounty from His endless provision and clemency.

Then He will tell him, "Return to your pulpit and recite the rest of the *Zabūr*." He will obey. God Most High will command that

i Uriah, as named below, who was a Hittite but fought on the Israelites' side. The biblical account, which contains a slur against David ﷺ, is in Old Testament, 2 Samuel, 11–12. Regarding the Ark, see Qur'ān 2:248: *And their Prophet said to them, 'The sign of his kingship is that there will come to you the Ark, wherein are tranquility from your Lord and a remnant of what the house of Moses and the house of Aaron left behind, borne by angels. Truly in that is a sign for you, if you are believers.'*

the Israelites be divided into two groups: one with the believers, another with the wicked.

The herald will then call, "Where is Jesus son of Mary?" He will be brought forward. [God] will say to him, *Did you say to mankind, "Take me and my mother as gods beside God?"* He will praise God for as long as He wills, and laud Him greatly; then he will humble himself and say, *Glory be to You! It was not for me to say anything to which I had no right. If I had said it, You would have known it. You know what is within Me, but I do not know what is within You. You are All-Knowing of things unseen* (Qur'ān 5:116). God Most High will smile and say, *"This is the Day those who were truthful shall benefit from their truthfulness* (Qur'ān 5:119). You have spoken truly, Jesus. Return to your pulpit and recite the Evangel that Gabriel conveyed unto you." He will reply, "Yes, Lord," and ascend his pulpit to recite. All eyes will be fixed upon him because of his beautiful voice and melodious chanting, for none can convey it as fittingly as he can. The Evangel will spring forth fresh and new, and the monks will feel as though they are hearing it for the first time. Then the Christians too will be divided into two: the wicked with the wicked, the believers with the believers.

Then the call will go up, "Where is Muḥammad ﷺ?" He will be brought forward. [God] will say to him, "Muḥammad! Gabriel here claims that he delivered the Qur'ān to you." He will reply, "Indeed he did, Lord." He will say, "Return to your pulpit and recite." He ﷺ will recite the Qur'ān, bringing it forth fresh and new, sweet and graceful. The Godfearing believers will rejoice in it, their faces *laughing, rejoicing* (Qur'ān 80:39), while the faces of the wicked will be *dusty, shrouded in gloom* [80:40-41].

The proof for this dialogue between God Most High and the Messengers can be found in His Words, *Indeed We shall question those to whom the message was sent, and We shall question the*

Messengers (Qur'ān 7:6), and His Words, *On the Day God gathers the Messengers and says, 'What answer were you given?', they will say, 'We have no knowledge. You alone are Knower of things unseen'* (Qur'ān 5:106). There are two opinions about this. Some hold that they will forget the answers they were given because of the horrors of that Day, while others hold that they will only say this out of deference to God, as Christ will do when he says, *If I had said it, You would have known it. You know what is within Me, but I do not know what is within You. You are the All-Knowing of things unseen* (Qur'ān 5:116). The former is sounder, as we discussed in the *Ibyā'*, because the Messengers have their own hierarchy and Christ ﷺ is one of the greatest of them, being the Word and Spirit of God.

When the Prophet ﷺ recites the Qur'ān, the Muslims will feel as if they are hearing it for the first time. Somebody once said to al-Aṣma'i,ⁱ "Do you claim that you have memorized the Book of God better than anyone else?" He replied, "Nephew, the Day I hear it from the Messenger of God ﷺ, it will be as if I never heard it before."

When the recitation of all the Scriptures is over, the call will sound from the pavilions of Majesty: *But stand apart this Day, O guilty ones!* (Qur'ān 36:59). The throng will tremble as a great wave of panic runs through it. The angels will be mixed with the jinn, and the jinn with mankind, all huddled together.

Then the call will go out: "Adam! Dispatch from your progeny a dispatch to Hell!" "How many, Lord?" he will ask, He will reply, "Nine hundred and ninety-nine from every thousand to Hell, and one to Paradise!" The atheists, the heedless, and the iniquitous will be led off one after another until no one is left but what is a handful to the Lord: as [Abū Bakr] al-Ṣiddīq ؓ said, "We are one

ⁱ A great scholar of the Arabic language and Qur'ānic sciences (d. 216/831).

of the handfuls of the Lord."² Those under a curse will be close to the satanic demons.

Some will have their deeds judged in the Balance, and the bad will seem to outweigh the good. All whom the Law reached in the world must be brought to the Balance. When they are led aside, certain of their impending doom, they will say, "Adam wronged us! The Hell-guardians have us by the forelocks!" But then the call will come from God Most High: *No wrong will be done this Day! Truly God is swift in reckoning* (Qur'ān 40:17). A great Book will be brought out, so vast that it fills the space from East to West, containing all the deeds of mankind; a *Book that leaves out neither small nor great, but counts them all. They shall be confronted with all that they did; and your Lord will not wrong anyone* (Qur'ān 18:49). For all the deeds of creation are presented each day to God Most High, and He commands the noble pure angels to record them in that great Book; as He says, *Truly We were recording all that you did* (Qur'ān 45:29).

[People] will then be summoned one by one to be reckoned, and even their feet and hands will testify, as God says: *The Day their tongues, their hands, and their feet testify against them regarding what they used to do* (Qur'ān 24:24). A narration states that a man will stand before God Almighty, Who will say to him, "Evil servant, you were a wicked sinner!" He will ask, "What did I do?" He will be told, "There is proof against you." Then the recording angels will be brought forth. He will attempt to defend himself and say, "They are lying about me!"; as God says: *The Day every soul will come pleading for itself* (Qur'ān 16:111). So his mouth will be sealed up, as God says: *Today We shall seal up their mouths, and their hands shall speak to Us, and their feet shall bear witness to what they used to earn* (Qur'ān 36:65). His limbs will bear witness against him, and he will be condemned to Hell. He will

reproach his limbs for this, but they will answer, "It was not of our choosing! God, Who made all things speak, made us speak."

After the Reckoning, they will be delivered into the custody of the keepers of Hell, wailing and crying. A great clamor will stir in them when they behold the faithful who believed in God's Oneness surrounded by angels who receive each of them: *The Supreme Horror shall not grieve them, and the angels shall receive them: 'This is your Day, the one you were promised.'* (Qur'ān 21:103). The Supreme Horror refers to four occasions: when the Horn is blown, when Hell slips out of its keepers' hands, when Adam sends away his throng, and when they are delivered into the custody of the keepers of Hell.

When none remain upon the plain but the believers in God's Oneness, the Muslims, the virtuous, the knowers-of-God (*'ārifūn*), the folk of true faith (*ṣiddiqūn*), the martyrs, the righteous, and the Messengers, their numbers unsullied by any doubters, hypocrites, or heretics, God Most High will say, "O you who stand upon the plain! Who is your Lord?" They will reply, "God." He will say, "Would you recognize Him?" They will reply, "Yes." Then an angel will appear to the left of the Throne, so immense that if the seven seas were placed in the hollow of his thumb they would not be visible. He will say to them, by God's command, "I am your Lord." They will reply, "We seek refuge with God from you!" Then another angel will appear to the right of the Throne, so immense that if the fourteen seas were placed in the hollow of his thumb they would not be visible. He will say to them, by God's command, "I am your Lord." They will reply, "We seek refuge with God from you!"

Then the Almighty Lord will reveal Himself to them in a form other than the one they expect of Him, and say, "I am your Lord." They will seek refuge in God Most High from Him. Finally He will reveal Himself in the form they expect of Him, and they will hear Him laugh, and every last one of them will fall down prostrate

before Him. He will say, "Welcome to you!" Then He will lead them to Paradise, and they will follow Him over the Bridge. People will pass over in throngs: first the Messengers, then the Prophets, then the people of true faith, then the virtuous, then the martyrs, then the believers, then the knowers-of-God. Some of the Muslims will lag behind: some prostrate upon their faces, some detained upon the Heights,ⁱ and some whose faith was incomplete. Some of them will take a hundred years to cross the Bridge, others a thousand. Yet the Fire will not burn anyone who has seen his Lord with his own eyes, for that vision is a safeguard from harm.

We have spoken about the stations of Muslim, believer, and virtuous one in our book *al-Istidrāj*.ⁱⁱ They will be in a disorderly crowd, wandering here and there and suffering from hunger and thirst. Their livers will splinter, and their breath will be like smoke. They will drink as many cups from the Basin as there are stars in the sky. Its water is from the river of Kawthar,³ which is as long as the distance between Jerusalem and Sanaa and as broad as the distance between Aden and Medina. The Prophet ﷺ said, "My pulpit is upon my Basin" (Bukhārī 1196), meaning at one edge of it in terms of measure, weight, and quantity. Those who are barred from it will be those who are preoccupied at the Bridge by their evil deeds.

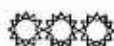
How many a man who performs ritual ablutions does not make a thorough job of it, nor inquire into the purity of the water he uses! How many a man who has not been questioned about his prayer performs a mere semblance of prayer, so devoid of piety and concentration that an ant-bite would disturb him! Yet those

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- i There will be a barrier between them, and on the Heights will be men who know all by their marks. They will call to the people of the Garden, 'Peace be upon you!' They will not have entered it, though they long to (Qur'ān 7:46).
 ii This work appears to have been lost, and this is the only reference to it in the Imam's other works. (Badawī, *Mu'allafāt al-Ghazālī*, p. 221.)

who know the Majesty of God would not move a muscle even if their hands and feet were cut off, so absorbed are they in reverence and contemplation; for they know the worth of Him before Whom they stand. A scorpion might sting a man who sits in an audience with a prince, and he might bear it without so much as stirring, out of deference to his host. Such is the way of the human being with his fellow creature, though he has no power to harm or benefit him. How, then, should it be for one who stands before God Most High and His awesome power, might, and glory?

It is said that a prince once threw something at the secretary of a sultan which pierced his foot, but he did not move until the prince stood up to leave. Yet if an ant were to bite such a man as he prayed, he would be disturbed at once and scratch it. This is what it means to show disdain for the Majesty of God Most High. A person who is so heedless will not pass over the Bridge. Such tales are sufficient to illustrate the ways in which religious actions may be spoiled.

It is said that anyone who knows God but is guilty of injustice will be brought before God Most High, and his injustices will be displayed to him, and the victim of his injustice will grab hold of him. Then God Most High will say, "O wronged one, look above your head!" He will look and see a magnificent palace that dazzles the eye. He will say, "What is this, Lord?" He will say, "It is for sale. Will you buy it from Me?" He will reply, "I cannot afford it." He will say, "If you pardon your brother for wronging you, it will be yours." He will say, "I do, Lord!" This is how God deals with penitent wrongdoers, as He says: *Truly He is Much-Forgiving to the penitent* (Qur'ān 17:25). The penitent person is one who desists from sin and never returns to it. David was called penitent, and so were other Messengers.⁴





THE SUPPLICATIONS OF THOSE STANDING
AWAITING JUDGEMENT, AND THE
DISAGREEMENT CONCERNING
WHAT HAS BEEN RELATED
ON THE SUBJECT

An authentic hadith states that the first matter God Most High will settle will be blood indemnities, and that the first to be recompensed will be those who lost their eyesight. On the Day of Resurrection, the blind will be summoned and told, "You are the most deserving to look upon Us." Then God Most High will welcome themⁱ and say to them, "Go to the right." A white banner will be raised for them and placed in the hand of Shu'ayb ؑ,ⁱⁱ who will go ahead of them. With them will be angels of light so numerous that none but God could count them, leading them in a procession like that of a bride. They will pass over the Bridge as quick as lightning. All will be characterized by the patience, forbearance, and knowledge of Ibn 'Abbāsⁱⁱⁱ and his ilk among this [Muslim] Community.

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- i The text here has *yastahyī*, "feel abashed," apparently without variance among the manuscripts, but the accounts of the other groups below feature the similarly spelled *yuhayyī*, "welcome", or *yurabhib*, also meaning "welcome," and other such expressions, so this may be a misapprehension on the part of a scribe.
- ii The blind Prophet, father-in-law of Moses, sometimes identified with the biblical Jethro.
- iii The great Companion, known as the Interpreter of the Qur'ān.

Then the call will go out, "Where are those who suffered tribulation?"—meaning the infirm. They will be brought forth, and God will welcome them very warmly and then tell them to go to the right. A green banner will be raised for them and placed in the hand of Job ۞, who will lead them to the right. They will have the patience, forbearance, and knowledge of 'Aqīl ibn Abī Ṭālibⁱ and his ilk among this Community.

Then the call will go out, "Where are the pious youths?" They will be brought before God Most High, who will welcome them with whatever words He wishes and then order them to the right. A red banner will be raised for them and placed in the hand of Joseph ۞, who will lead them to the right. These youths will be characterized by the patience and forbearance of Rāshid ibn Sulaymānⁱⁱ and his ilk among this Community.

The call will then go out, "Where are those who loved one another for the sake of God Most High?" They will be brought before God Most High, who will welcome them with whatever words He wishes and then order them to the right. A yellow banner will be raised for them and placed in the hand of Aaron ۞, who will lead them to the right. Those who loved one another for the sake of God will be characterized by patience, knowledge, and forbearance, such that they never grow angry or displeased for any worldly cause, like Abū Turāb 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālibⁱⁱⁱ ۞ and his ilk among this Community.

Then the call will go out, "Where are those who wept in fear of God Most High?" They will be brought before God, and their tears will be weighed against the blood of the martyrs and the ink

i A Companion who was the elder brother of Imam 'Alī.

ii I have not been able to identify this Rāshid or find any mention of him other than in a tale related by Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Muzāḥim of a mysterious figure he encountered in a dream (Nabḥānī, *Jāmi' karāmāt al-awliyā'* 2/71).

iii The son-in-law of the Prophet ۞ and fourth caliph of Islam. Abū Turāb ("Dusty") was an affectionate nickname bestowed on him by the Prophet ۞.

of the scholars; and the tears will prove heaviest. God will order them to the right, and a multicolored banner will be raised for them, since they wept for many reasons: some in fear, others in hope, others in regret. The banner will be placed in the hand of Noah . The scholars, who had hoped to be foremost, will say, "It was our knowledge that made them weep!" Then the call will go out, "Halt, Noah!", and the entire band will stop.

Then the ink of the scholars will be weighed against the blood of the martyrs, and the blood will prove heavier. [God] will order them to the right. A saffron banner will be raised for them and placed in the hand of John , who will lead them off. The scholars, who had hoped to be foremost, will say, "It was on account of our knowledge that they fought! We deserve to go ahead of them!" God, Glorious and Majestic is He, will smile and tell them: "You are to Me as My Prophets. Intercede for whom you will. The scholar will intercede for his neighbors and brothers, and an angel will be sent out on behalf of each one of them calling out to the people, "So-and-So the scholar has been permitted to intercede for all those who ever did him a favor, or fed him a morsel of food when he was hungry, or gave him water when he was thirsty! Let them go to him, for he is interceding for them!" An authentic narration states that the first to intercede will be the Messengers, then the Prophets, then the scholars. A white banner will be raised for them and placed in the hand of Abraham , for of all Messengers he received the most unveilings.

Then the call will go out, "Where are the poor?" They will be brought before God Most High, Who will say to them, "Welcome to those for whom the world was a prison!" Then He will order them to the right, and a yellow banner will be raised for them and placed in the hand of Jesus , who will lead them to the right.

Then the call will go out, "Where are the wealthy?" They will be brought before God Most High, Who will recount His favors

to them for five hundred years, then order them to the right. A multicolored banner will be raised for them and placed in the hand of Solomon ﷺ, who will lead them to the right.

A hadith says that four figures will be cited in argument against four groups. First the wealthy and prosperous will be called and asked, "What kept you from worshipping God Most High?" They will reply, "He gave us wealth and prosperity, which kept us from fulfilling His due in the world." They will be asked, "Who was wealthier—Solomon ﷺ, or you?" They will reply, "Solomon." They will be told, "Yet that did not keep him from fulfilling God's due, or dedicating himself to His remembrance!"

Then the people who suffered tribulation will be summoned and asked, "What kept you from worshipping God Most High?" They will reply, "God sent tribulation upon us in the world in the form of all manner of misfortunes and difficulties, which kept us from remembering Him and fulfilling His due." They will be asked, "Who suffered more: Job ﷺ, or you?" They will reply, "Job." They will be told, "Yet that did not keep him from fulfilling God's due, or dedicating himself to His remembrance!"

Then the youths in their prime and the slaves will be summoned and asked, "What kept you from worshipping God?" They will reply, "He gave us beauty and vigor which captivated us and kept us from fulfilling His due." The slaves will answer, "The bonds of servitude preoccupied us in the world." They will be asked, "Who was more beautiful—you or Joseph ﷺ?" They will reply, "Joseph." They will be told, "Yet being in the bondage of servitude did not keep him from fulfilling God's due, or dedicating himself to His remembrance!"

Then the poor will be summoned and brought forth in all their diversity, and asked, "What kept you from fulfilling the due of God Most High?" They will reply, "God tried us with poverty in the world, which kept us from fulfilling His due." They will be asked,

"Who was poorer—Jesus ﷺ, or you?" They will reply, "Jesus." They will be told, "Yet that did not keep him from fulfilling God's due, or dedicating himself to His remembrance!"

Those who find themselves in any of these four conditions would do well to remember the examples they have in those figures. The Messenger of God ﷺ used to supplicate, "Dear God, I seek refuge with You from the tribulations of wealth and poverty" (Bukhārī 6368). Consider the example of Christ ﷺ, and how it is told that he did not own a single purse, and that he wore a woolen robe for twenty years, and wandered from place to place with only a cup and comb to his name. Then one day he saw a man drinking from his hand, and so threw down the cup and never picked it up again. Then he passed by a man combing his beard with his fingers, and so he gave up the comb too. He used to say, "My feet are my steed, the caves of the earth are my houses, its plants are my food, and its rivers are my water. What more wealth could one ask? Children of Israel, eat barley bread and wild onions. Beware of wheat bread, for you will not be grateful for it!"

Likewise, a man will be summoned on the Day of Resurrection, and God Most High will ask him, "How did you fare in the world?" He will reply, "I worshiped You for five hundred years on an island surrounded by the sea. No consolation did I find there except in Your remembrance through fasting and prayer, until I died in prostration." God will say, "You have spoken the truth. Enter Paradise by My mercy." The man will say, "No, Lord! By my works." God will say, "Very well, I shall settle the account. My servant, who gave you the strength to spend five hundred years on that island worshiping with fasting and prayer?" He will reply, "You did, Lord." He will say, "And who made that pomegranate tree grow for you, providing you each day with fruit to eat?" He will reply, "You did, Lord." He will say, "And who made that spring of fresh water gush forth for you on that island surrounded by

the salty sea, so that you might drink and bathe?" He will reply, "You did, Lord." He will say, "And who answered you when you prayed, 'Lord, take my spirit while I prostrate'?" He will reply, "You did, Lord." Then the Balance will be set up for him, and his five hundred years of worship will not equal the blessing of sight alone; the light of sight will outweigh it. God Most High will say, "Take him off to Hell!" Then as he is being taken there God will call him back, laughing, and say, "Enter Paradise—by My mercy. What a fine servant you are!"

Likewise, another man will be brought forward on the Day of Resurrection and held to account, and condemned to Hell. Then on the way, he will look behind him. God Most High will say, "Bring him back to Me." Then He will say to him, "Evil servant, why did you look back?" He will reply, "Lord, I used to disobey You, yet I had hope in You; and when I died, I had hope in You; and when You reckoned me, I had hope in You; and when You condemned me to Hell, I had hope in You, and so I looked towards You." God Almighty will say, "You had hope in a Generous One and placed your expectation in a Generous One. Go, for I have forgiven you."

Thus forgiveness from God may come during the Reckoning, even when in respect of the rights a person owes to others—except for murder, which like idolatry is unforgiveable, unless the idolater embraces Islam and the murderer repents sincerely and never repeats his crime. For a murderer kills someone to whom God gave life.

One of the heavenly Scriptures says: "Son of Adam, how unjust you are! You have tried to become My partner in My acts. Do you not see what you have done? I give life, and you deal death! Take care, killer, for you have declared war upon Me!"

Another heavenly Scripture says, "Son of Adam, you do good in My sight, and evil in My sight: you save the life of the dying, and deal death to the living." To give life means feeding the hungry,

rescuing victims of injustice, and other such things. To deal death means murder, as well as other crimes when the perpetrator does not make any effort to expiate them or to grant retribution. Beware of both, for they are terrible evils.

Yet even those who commit grave sins may hope for intercession once they have been purged. Those of them who are noblest in God's sight may leave Hell after a thousand years, by which time they will have been charred black. Hasan al-Basriⁱ used to say, may God have mercy on him, "If only I could be that man!" Without doubt, he was knowledgeable concerning matters of the Hereafter.

Another man will be brought forward on the Day of Resurrection whose good and bad deeds are exactly balanced, without any other good deed to tip the scales in his favor. God Most High will say to him in His mercy, "Go among the people and find one who will give you one good deed to bear you into Paradise." He will go searching through all mankind, but not find anyone willing to speak to him of this. Everyone he asks will say, "I fear that my scale will be too light as it is! I need it more than you do." Just as he is about to lose hope, a man will ask him, "What is it you are seeking?" He will reply, "One good deed. I passed by people with thousands of them, but they denied me." The man will say, "I met God Most High with only a single good deed to my name. I do not think it will be of any use to me. Take it as a gift from me to you." He will take it and head off joyfully. God will ask him, "How have you fared?" though He knows full well. He will tell Him what happened. God will summon the man who gifted him the good deed and say to him, "My generosity outdoes yours. Take your brother's hand and go together to Paradise."

Another man, too, will find his scales equally balanced, God will say to him, "You are neither fit for Paradise nor for Hell." Then an

i An influential early ascetic and sage (d. 110/728).

angel will come bearing a page and set it in the scale of bad deeds, upon which is written, "Ugh!" This will tip the balance in favor of the bad deeds, for it is the word indicating defiance of parents,ⁱ heavier than the mountains of the world. So the man will be condemned to Hell. He will ask to be taken back to God, Who will say, "Bring him back." Then He will say to him, "Defiant servant, why did you ask to be brought back?" He will reply, "My God, I saw that I was bound for Hell without doubt, and that I died in defiance of my father in the world, and that he is also bound for Hell as I am. Impose my father's punishment on me instead, and spare him from it!" God Most High will laugh and say, "You defied him in the world, but you have treated him dutifully in the Hereafter! Take your father's hand and go together to Paradise."

In this manner, as the angels bear each person to Hell they will stop with him; for they understand the secret of how the Hereafter functions. Some will be called who have no good in them at all, as though they were created to be fuel for the Fire. Yet still it will be said, *Stop them, for they must be questioned!* (Qur'ān 37:24), and they will halt until they are called, *Why do you not help one another?* (Qur'ān 37:25). They will surrender and confess their sins, as God says: *Thus will they confess their sin* (Qur'ān 67:11). When the Hell-guardians see them submitting, moaning, questioning one another, and confessing, they will be uncertain as to whether or not they should be punished. Then the call will come from God Most High: *Away with the people of the Blaze!* (Qur'ān 67:11), and they will be driven all together into Hell.

Those from the Community of Muḥammad ﷺ who are guilty of grave sin—the old, the infirm, the young, the women, the

i Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him, and be good to parents. If one or both of them should reach old age with you, do not say to them 'Ugh', nor chide them, but speak to them gracious words (Qur'ān 17:23).

men—will be brought forth. When Mālik the Keeper of Hell sees them, he will say, "Who are you wretched ones? Why do I see your hands unbound, your legs unfettered and unchained? Why are your faces not blackened? None have been sent to me with such fine appearances!" They will reply, "Mālik, we are the wretched ones of the Community of Muḥammad ﷺ. Let us weep for our sins!" He will say, "Weep, but it will do you no good." Many an old man will grasp his beard and lament his misfortune and the loss of his youth and vigor. Many a woman will pull her hair and lament her wretched state and loss of dignity. They will weep for a thousand years.

Then God will call, "Mālik! Send them into Hell through the first gate!" Just as Hell is about to take them, they will all say as one, "There is no god but God!" With this, Hell will flee a journey of five hundred miles from them. They will begin to weep and wail louder still. The call will come from God, "Hell, take them! Mālik, send them into Hell through the first gate!" At this, they will let out a cry as loud as thunder. As Hell is about to char their hearts, Mālik will stop it, saying, "You shall not burn any heart that has the Qur'ān within it, any heart in which faith found a home!" The Guardians of Hell will come carrying scalding water to pour into their bellies, but Mālik will stop them, saying, "You shall not pour scalding water into any belly that hungered in Ramaḍān, nor shall the Fire burn any forehead that prostrated to the All-Merciful!" So they will be sent back, scorched like blackened sinners, but with faith glittering in their hearts.

There will be another man who cries out in Hell so loudly that his voice will be audible over the voices of all the others. Then he will be brought out, charred black, and God Most High will ask him, "How is it that you cried out louder than anyone else in Hell?" He will reply, "Lord, when You gave me my reckoning I did not lose hope in Your mercy; when You sent me to Hell, I did

not lose hope in Your mercy; and even as the Fire burned me, I did not lose hope in Your mercy. I knew that You would hear me, so I cried out as loud as I could. I never despaired or lost hope in Your mercy." God will say, "*Who would despair of the mercy of his Lord, save those who are astray?*" (Qur'ān 15:56). Go, for I have forgiven you."

Another man will be brought out of Hell, and God will say to him, "You have come out of Hell. By right of what deed will you enter Paradise?" He will reply, "Lord, I ask You nothing but a small part of it." One of the trees of Paradise will rise before him, and God Most High will say, "Tell Me: if I gave you this tree, would you ask Me for anything else?" He will reply, "No, Lord, by Your glory." God will say, "Then it is a gift from Me to you." When he eats from it and sits beneath its shade, another more beautiful tree will rise before him, and he will keep on stealing glances at it. God Most High will say to him, "What are you doing? Perhaps you would like it?" He will reply, "Yes, Lord." God will say, "If I gave it to you, would you ask Me for anything else?" He will reply, "No, Lord, by Your glory." God will say, "Then it is a gift from Me to you." When he eats from it and sits beneath its shade, another tree will rise before him, more beautiful than both. He will keep on stealing glances at it, but his Lord will pardon him, for He well knows that he cannot help it. God will say, "Perhaps you would like it?" He will reply, "Yes, Lord." God will say, "If I gave it to you, would you ask Me for anything else?" He will reply, "No, Lord, by Your glory, I will not ask You for more." God Most High will laugh, and sent him to Paradise, where He will give him a share many times as large as the world and all its dominions. I have recounted several similar narrations in the *Iḥyā'*.

It is also relatedⁱ that when God Most High appears to them, He will grasp the seven heavens in His Right Hand and the seven earths in His Left. As He says: *The entire earth will be in His grasp on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens rolled up in His Right Hand* (Qur'ān 39:67). And when they are rolled up, they will crash and clatter louder than thunder; as He says, *The Day We roll up the heaven like the rolling up of written scrolls* (Qur'ān 21:104). The word *sijill* used in this verse means paper on which something has been written, as distinct from *qirtās* which means blank paper.

An authentic hadith states that God Most High will roll up the earth as one rolls up a piece of bread to take on a journey (Bukhārī 6520). Another hadith¹ says that the first food the people of Paradise will eat will be the extra lobe from the liver of the fish upon which the seven earths sit. It will be roasted and served to them along with the lowest earth, which on that day will be like bread. Another authentic hadith states that when they enter Paradise they will be of the same stature as Adam ﷺ,² and that they will be smooth-skinned and beardless, their eyes anointed with kohl.

The weighing on that Day will be true (Qur'ān 7:8), and the time between the appearance of the two angels in the guise of God and the true appearance of the Holy Form will be but the blink of an eye.

One of the more unusual traditions concerning the Hereafter is the one that tells of how when a man is brought before God Most High to be reckoned he will feel certain, as his good and bad deeds are weighed, that God is reckoning him alone and no other. Yet in fact, at that very moment countless millions of others will also be undergoing their own reckonings, each of them supposing that they are undergoing it alone. They will not see or hear one another,

i Some manuscripts make reference to a book called *al-Targhib, al-Tartib*, or *Tartib al-nasaq* here, but it is not clear which work is meant.

but will be totally veiled. Glory be to Him Who can do this! Glory be to Him of Whose power and marvelous wisdom this is a mere fraction! Truly, anyone who reveres anything but Him is lost and wretched. This is the meaning of His Words, *Your creation and your resurrection are as but a single soul* (Qur'ān 31:28). His Words *We shall attend to you, O you weighty two!* (Qur'ān 55:21) also allude to this, which is one of the great mysteries of the spiritual realm; for His dominion has no limits. Glory be to Him Who is never kept from one thing by any other!

On that Day, a man will go to his son and say, "Son, I clothed you when you could not clothe yourself, fed you when you could not feed yourself, and took care of you in your infancy when you could neither attain benefit nor protect yourself from harm. How many times did you ask me for an apple and I buy it for you? Now the terrors of the Day of Resurrection are all around us, and the sins of your father are many. Will you not take a single sin of mine and bear it for me to lighten my load? Will you not give me just one good deed to add to my account?" But his son will flee from him, saying, "I need it more!"—and he will do likewise with his kin, his wife, and his brother. As God says: *The Day when a man will flee from his brother, and his mother and his father, and his wife and his children* (Qur'ān 80:34-36).

An authentic hadith states that mankind will be resurrected naked (Bukhārī 3349). 'Ā'isha رضي الله عنها said upon hearing this, "How shameful it will be for them, to see one another so!" The Prophet ﷺ replied, *On that Day every one of them will have enough to preoccupy them* (Qur'ān 80:37). In other words, the horrors of the moment will consume their attention to such a degree that they will not so much as glance at one another. Then once they are all gathered upon the plain, a black cloud will rise over them and rain down unfurled pages upon them. The believer's page will be a rose petal, while the unbeliever's will be a lote-tree leaf. All will

have writing on them, and they will float into people's right or left hands regardless of their choosing. Thus God says: *We shall bring forth for him, on the Day of Resurrection, a Record he will find laid open* (Qur'ān 17:13). If the pages were furled there would be no way of unfurling them, people being crushed together and clinging to one another.

One of the righteous early Muslims, a man of letters, related that the Basin will be visited after the Bridge is crossed, but this is incorrect: no one who has crossed the Bridge will visit the Basin thereafter. It will be on the seven stages of the Bridge that most people meet their doom.

Seventy thousand will enter Paradise without any reckoning or weighing of deeds, and without receiving any pages, other than a document of indemnity on which is written, "There is no god but God; Muḥammad is the Messenger of God. So-and-so, son of So-and-so, is hereby declared innocent, admitted into Paradise, and saved from Hell." After God has forgiven his sins, the angel will take him by the arm and lead him about the Standing-Place calling out, "This is So-and-So, son of So-and-So! God has forgiven his sins and granted him ultimate bliss, after which there will never be sorrow!" This will be the happiest moment he has ever experienced. Something analogous will be done with the damned, and it will be the worst thing they have ever experienced: the angel will announce their names and say, "There is ultimate damnation, after which there will never be joy!"

On the Day of Resurrection the Messengers will be upon pulpits, and the Prophets and saintsⁱ will be upon smaller pulpits. Each Messenger's pulpit will be commensurate with his status. The people of knowledge and praxis will be upon pedestals of light.

i Reading *awliyā'* from Gautier's MS. A, rather than *'ulamā'* (scholars) from others, given what follows.

The martyrs and the righteous, such as the reciters of Qur'ān and muezzins, will be upon a mound of musk. These people of righteous actions, those upon the pedestals, will be the ones who seek intercession from Adam, Noah, and so on until they come to the [final] Messenger of God ﷺ.

Every significant figure will come forward in person on the Day of Resurrection. It is related that the Qur'ān itself will come forth in the form of a man with a handsome face and figure, and that it will be permitted to intercede. Islam will come forward in the same way to argue the case for those who practiced it. We have related the narrative about Islam and 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb رضي الله عنه in the *Iḥyā'*. After it has argued its case, God will make whomever He wills cling to it, and it will convey them to Paradise.

The world, too, will come forward in the form of a haggard old woman as ugly as can be. Humankind will be asked, "Do you know who this is?" They will reply, "We seek God's refuge from her!" They will be told, "This is the world, for whose sake you used to envy and hate one another!"

The Friday prayer, too, will come forward in the form of a bride in wedding array, as beautiful as can be. The believers will gather around her, surrounded by mounds of musk and camphor, light shining upon them, to the delight of all those standing upon the Plain. Then it will lead them into Paradise.

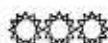
Consider, then, may God Most High have mercy on you, how such things as the Qur'ān, Islam, and Friday will be present, personified. Such would be unimaginable in this world, for they do not have tangible identities but are bound to the spiritual world. Anyone who is aware of this would never say that the Qur'ān is created, as the Jahmiyyaⁱ did, being unaware that the person of

i The anthropomorphist sect founded by Jahm ibn Ṣafwān (d. 128/745).

the Qur'ān is a being of the Realm of Divine Dominion, while Islam is a being of the Spiritual Realm, just like prayer and fasting.

Nor should any heed be paid to those who argue that souls cease to exist upon death by citing the Prophet's ﷺ words at the Battle of the Trench, "Dear God, Lord of bodies bound for decay and spirits bound for annihilation," or how he ﷺ referred to visiting graves as "the living visiting the dead." Such statements have been taken out of context and can be interpreted in many ways. We have written more on this subject elsewhere. Our intention here was to be brief and follow the way of the Sunna, and to steer clear of heretical innovations that contravene the Law.

We ask God for protection, success, and guidance, by His grace and favor. *God is sufficient for us, and how excellent a Guardian is He!* (Qur'ān 3:173). May God bless our master Muḥammad and all his Family and Companions, and grant them abundant peace. Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds.





ENDNOTES

THE WISDOM IN GOD'S CREATION (*Al-Hikma fi makhlūqāt Allāh*)

Chapter 14: The Heart Exults in the Glory of God

- 1 Baghawī, *Tafsīr* 5/218.

EPISTLE OF THE BIRDS (*Risālat al-Tayr*)

- 1 Bayhaqī, *Shu'ab al-imān* 670.

IMAM AL-GHAZĀLĪ ON COSMOLOGICAL QUESTIONS (*al-Ajwiba al-Ghazālīyya fi al-masā'il al-ukhrawiyya*)

- 1 Tabarānī, *Kabīr* 13580.
- 2 Narrated by Ibn Mandah, and cited in Abūl-Qāsim Ismā'il al-Iṣbahānī, *al-Hujja fi bayān al-mahajja*, no. 310.
- 3 Tabarānī, *Musnad al-Shāmiyyīn* 2662.
- 4 Aḥmad, *Musnad* 16623 with "between spirit and body."

THE SUMPTUOUS PEARL, ON THE SCIENCES OF ESCHATOLOGY (*al-Durra al-fākhira fi kashf 'ulūm al-ākhirā*)

Chapter 2: The Ascent of the Righteous Soul

- 1 Aḥmad, *Musnad* 18534.

Chapter 4: The Inquisition in the Grave

- 1 Hadith source couldn't be verified.
- 2 Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *al-Istidhāk* 1/185.

Chapter 5: The Four Stations of the Interworld (*Barzakb*)

- 1 Tabarānī, *Kabīr* 124.
- 2 With a similar wording in Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ* 1887.

Chapter 9: The Intercession

- 1 Ṣaḥīḥ 7481.
- 2 Ibn Abi Shayba, *Muṣannaf* 31739.
- 3 See Qur'ān 108.

ENDNOTES

- 4 See Qur'ān 38:17, 30, 44.

The Supplications of Those Standing Awaiting Judgement, and the Disagreement Concerning What Has Been Related on the Subject

- 1 It is actually the same hadith.
2 Ibn Abi Hātim, *Tafsir* 13756.

